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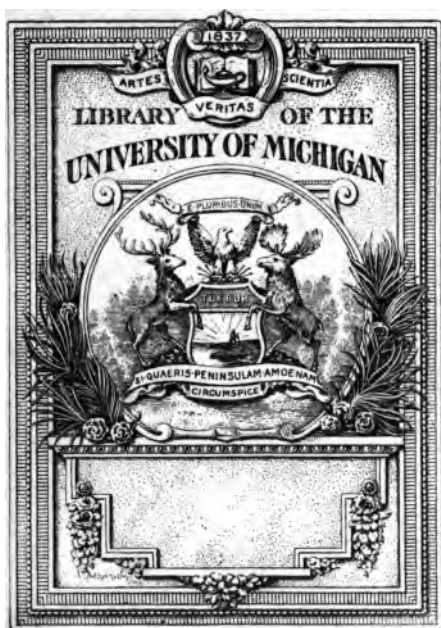
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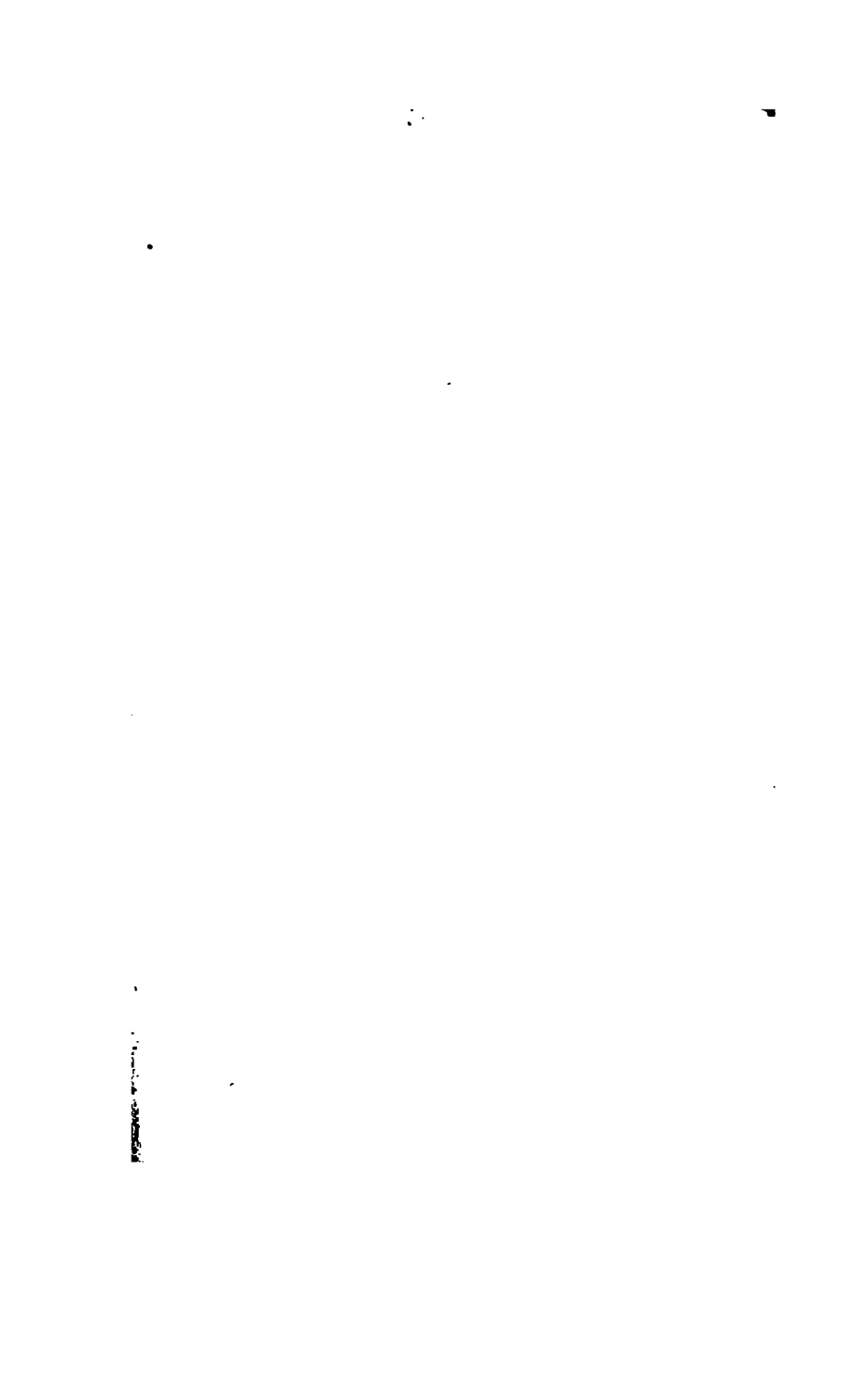
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**Columbia University**  
**STUDIES IN ROMANCE PHILOLOGY AND**  
**LITERATURE**

**DIDEROT AS A**  
**DISCIPLE OF ENGLISH THOUGHT**

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"Il est clair, pour tous ceux qui ont des yeux,  
que sans les Anglais la raison et la philosophie  
seraient encore dans l'enfance la plus méprisable  
en France . . . ."

*Diderot à Catherine II, 1775.*



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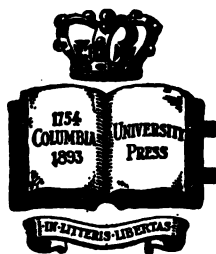
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**DIDEROT**  
AS A  
**DISCIPLE OF ENGLISH THOUGHT**

BY  
R. LOYALTY CRU, PH.D.  
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To  
JOHN VISCOUNT MORLEY,  
WHOSE WORKS ON  
VOLTAIRE, ROUSSEAU  
AND  
DIDEROT AND THE ENCYCLOPÆDISTS  
ARE THE SINCEREST STUDIES  
YET DEVOTED, IN ANY LANGUAGE,  
TO THE ILLUSTRIOUS DISCIPLES OF ENGLISH THOUGHT  
WHO ILLUMINED EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE  
AND INFLUENCED THE DESTINIES OF THE WORLD,  
THIS BOOK  
IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

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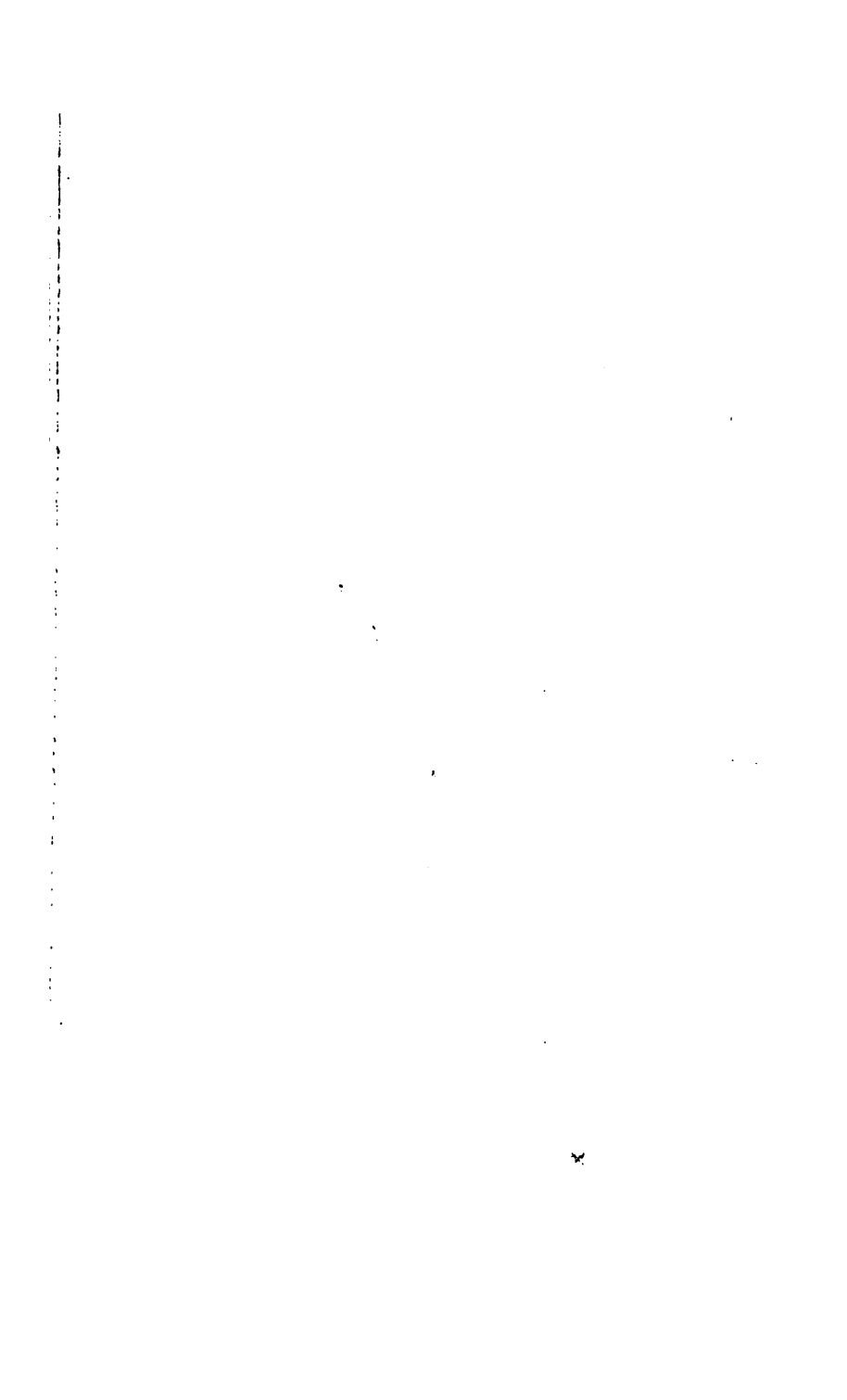
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# Diderot as a Disciple of English Thought

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## INTRODUCTION

"The junction of the French and English intellects, which, looking at the immense chain of its effects, is by far the most important fact in the history of the eighteenth century,"<sup>1</sup> is also the most significant and far-reaching movement in the history of French literature. Until that time, England had often looked to France for intellectual leadership, more especially after the Norman Conquest, during the Renaissance, and after the Restoration, while France had ignored the thought and art of her northern neighbor: but in the eighteenth century, England became the leader, the masters became the disciples, and the message they received and interpreted was heard by all nations.

This great intellectual revolution has received

<sup>1</sup> H. T. Buckle, *History of English Civilization*, I, Chap. 12.

a great deal of attention since Buckle first emphasized its importance, more than half a century ago. The circumstances by which it was brought about, the progress of the English influence, and the manner in which it affected the most eminent minds in France during the philosophic age, are questions which had been barely touched upon by historians of French literature, like Villemain and Barante, in the first half of the nineteenth century. Within the last sixty years they have been brought into clearer light, by Buckle himself, in his *History of English Civilization*, and by Lord Morley, in his admirable studies on the French Philosophers, *Rousseau* (1873), *Voltaire* (1874), and *Diderot and the Encyclopædists* (1878); in France, by Joseph Texte, in his work on *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et les origines du cosmopolitisme littéraire* (1895), and by M. J. J. Jusserand, in his *Shakespeare en France sous l'ancien régime* (1898),—two books teeming with information for the student of comparative literature.

Nor has the detail of the influences exerted in France by English writers, and of the in-

debtedness of individual French authors to English thought, been neglected in the study of that great epoch which has been characterized as that of the "discovery of England" by the French. What M. Jusserand has done for Shakespeare, in tracing the rise of his popularity in France from its obscure beginnings to its climax in French Romanticism, has been done by Mr J. M. Telleen for Milton, by M. Léon Morel for Thomson, by M. W. Thomas and M. F. Baldensperger for Young,<sup>2</sup> while valuable studies have been written by M. Huchon on Mrs Montagu and by Mr Hedgecock on David Garrick in their relation to French society in the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Concerning English influences on French writers in that age, fewer works have appeared. The Abbé J. Dedieu has given a comprehensive view of Montesquieu's indebtedness to the political tradition of Eng-

<sup>2</sup> J. M. Telleen, *Milton dans la littérature française*, Paris, 1904.—L. Morel, *James Thomson, sa vie et ses œuvres*, Paris, 1895.—W. Thomas, *Le poète Edward Young*, 1901.—F. Baldensperger, "Young et ses 'Nuits' en France," in *Etudes d'histoire littéraire*, I, 1907.

<sup>3</sup> René Huchon, *Mrs Montagu and her friends*, London, 1906.—F. A. Hedgecock, *David Garrick et ses amis français*, Paris, 1911, transl. London and N. Y., 1912.

land; on Voltaire, an admirably thorough study of the English sources of his *Lettres Philosophiques* is to be found in M. Lanson's critical edition of that work (Société des Textes Français Modernes, Paris, 1909, 2 vols); while the late Churton Collins, Mr Walter Sichel, and several others, have thrown some light on Voltaire's friendship with Bolingbroke and his sojourn in England.<sup>4</sup> But it is surprising, and much to be regretted, that there is as yet no work dealing with the whole subject of the relations of Voltaire with English thought.

The same lack is felt in the case of Diderot, who, although he has been called "the most German of Frenchmen," is however "full of England" in his works.<sup>5</sup> A great deal of atten-

<sup>4</sup> Churton Collins, *Bolingbroke; Voltaire in England*, 1886; reprinted with additions in *Voltaire, Montesquieu and Rousseau in England*, 1908.—W. Sichel, *Bolingbroke and his times*, 2 vols, 1901.—To which one may add Ballantyne, *Voltaire's Visit to England*, 1893, and two articles on the same subject by M. L. Foulet in *Rev. d'hist. litt.*, 1906, 1908.

<sup>5</sup> "He has been described by a most consummate judge [by Goethe] as the most German of all the French. And his style is deeply marked by that want of feeling for the exquisite, that dulness of edge, that bluntness of stroke, which is the common note of all German litera-

tion has been devoted by historians of German literature to his influence in Germany, particularly on the drama, through Lessing; and an interesting study might yet be written on Diderot and his German friends, and on the Germanic features of his genius which made him so great in the eyes, not only of Grimm and Lessing, but of Schiller and Goethe. The Italian Diderot could also be made the subject of a curious though less considerable inquiry; for, like Voltaire and many other contemporaries he was a good Italian scholar, and his indebtedness to Italian literature, after a good deal of culture, save a little of the very highest" (J. Morley, *Diderot* . . ., I, p. 39).

F. Brunetière, *Manuel de l'hist. de la litt. franç.*, 1898, p. 321-322: ". . . On ne trouve rien que d'anglais dans l'œuvre de l'homme que l'on appelle encore souvent le 'plus allemand' des Français."—Also, in his *Epoques du théâtre franç.*: "On a dit de Diderot qu'il était 'le plus allemand des Français,' et je crois que l'on s'est trompé; mais si l'on disait qu'il fut tout anglais, on serait assez près de la vérité" (1896, p. 313).—See also F. Loliée, *Les littératures comparées*, p. 268: "Chaucer est plein de France et d'Italie, Corneille d'Espagne, Shakespeare et Molière d'Italie, Diderot d'Angleterre"; and J. Texte, *Etudes de littératures européenne*, p. 16-17: "Si Voltaire doit beaucoup à l'Angleterre, Diderot lui doit plus encore."



troversy, is still to be determined. What has been attempted in the present work is a delineation of the English aspect of that prolific and truly cosmopolitan genius, that is to say a study of his life and works with constant reference to the various English influences that were brought to bear upon them. It need not be said, therefore, that this is not in any way a complete presentation of Diderot, his character, his writings, and his influence, but only a partial sketch of one of the most curious figures in French literature, "Diderot the Englishman," and a survey of the abundant and varied inspiration which he drew from English thought.

Born in 1713, in the year when the Treaty of Utrecht was concluded, at a time when the political power of England was decidedly in the ascendant, he reached manhood and started on an eventful literary career in a decade (1733-1743) when England, already embroiled in fresh quarrels with France, was becoming an object of immense interest for the intellectual part of the French nation. This interest, far from abating, increased greatly in the following twenty years, during that period marked in

European history by the War of the Austrian Succession and the Seven Years' War, which, at the Treaty of Paris, in 1763, ended disastrously for France as a world power, by the loss of nearly the whole of the first French colonial empire. He died in 1784, one year after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles: the independence of the United States of America had been recognized, the pride of Great Britain humbled, and the excellence of her Constitution, as well as the wisdom of her policies, which Voltaire and Montesquieu had so much admired, had for some time become a matter of general doubt.<sup>6</sup>

Through all those years, which had seen the rise, the glory, and the temporary decline of the British power in war and diplomacy, the

\*The preface for instance of a poem on the Independence of America, *L'Amérique Délivrée*, dedicated to John Adams (Amsterdam, 1783, 2 vols), illustrates in a curious manner this reaction against "l'anglomanie." The author, who signs with the initials L. C. d. l. G., declares that "the much vaunted wonder, the British Constitution, was, just as much as the codes of neighboring nations, subject to the convulsions of despotism, the misdeeds of tyranny, and perhaps more favorable to a corruption most dangerous to the people whose reins it held so clumsily."

intellectual influence of England had been steadily gaining ground in France, where it was to remain the paramount foreign inspiration for many years to come. The language, the literature, the philosophy, the laws, the manners of England, which during the reign of Louis XIV had been unknown in France, or, when known, had been despised,<sup>7</sup> were in the eighteenth century studied with the greatest eagerness by the French. England was considered by them as the land of original thought, independent theories, curious observations, practical suggestions, new departures in every field of intellectual activity. Such a reaction was but natural and inevitable after what Buckle calls the brilliant and slavish classical age of France.

“For where but in England was a literature to be found that could satisfy those bold and inquisitive thinkers who arose in France after the death of Louis XIV? In their own country there had no doubt been great displays of eloquence, of fine dramas, and of poetry, which, though never reaching the highest point of excel-

<sup>7</sup>See on this subject Buckle (vol. I, p. 517), Texte (pp. 1-16), M. Jusserand (pp. 89-94), in their works noted above.

lence, is of finished and admirable beauty. But it is an unquestionable fact, and one melancholy to contemplate, that during the sixty years which succeeded the death of Descartes, France had not yet possessed a single man who dared to think for himself.<sup>8</sup> Metaphysicians, moralists, historians, all had become tainted by the servility of that bad age. During two generations, no Frenchman had been allowed to discuss with freedom any question either of politics or of religion. The consequence was, that the largest intellects, excluded from their legitimate field, lost their energy; the national spirit died away; the very materials and nutriment of thought seemed to be wanting. No wonder, then, if the great Frenchmen of the eighteenth century sought that aliment abroad which they were unable to find at home. No wonder if they turned from their own land, and gazed with admiration at the only people who, pushing their inquiries into the highest departments, had shown the same fearlessness in politics as in religion; a people who, having punished their kings and controlled their clergy, were storing the treasures of their experience in that

\*An exception might be made for Pascal at least. But Buckle evidently had in mind here independent *rationalistic* thought; and it is true that what seeds of it Descartes had sown found a good soil only in England and the Netherlands. Besides, one knows but too well what treatment Jansenism received at the hands of Louis XIV.

noble literature which never can perish, and of which it may be said in sober truth, that it has stimulated the intellects of the most distant races."<sup>9</sup>

In a comparatively short time the French became even more fearless than the English, if not in art, at least in philosophy, in religion, and finally in the domain of political action, eliciting from England itself passionately eloquent protests "in sounds that echo still."

Diderot, with his enthusiastic nature, was strongly predisposed to share that admiration for the boldness of English thought which through his lifetime was like a contagion in France. The universality of his mind, his curiosity, his indefatigable activity in the most varied fields of science and literature, made him the ready disciple of English masters. More than Voltaire, Montesquieu and Rousseau, he drew examples and lessons from that nation which had a reputation for profound thinking, independence in words and deeds, and virtue both private and public.

There is some difference, however, in the

\* H. T. Buckle, *Hist. of Engl. Civiliz.*, I, p. 524 (2d edit.).

manner in which England as a nation affected the greatest intellects of France in the eighteenth century. The two most conspicuous spirits in the earlier half of the philosophic age, Voltaire and Montesquieu, can be considered as belonging to the upper middle-class, the one being issued from the "bourgeoisie," and the other, although "noble d'épée," being an eminent representative of the "noblesse de robe," that is to say, that part of the professional Third Estate which had entered the privileged order. They had seen the England of 1730, and felt at once in sympathy with its manners, its traditions, and that political Constitution which had been gaining strength and authority under the reigns of Queen Anne and the first two Georges. They had had intercourse with Englishmen of rank or wit; they had directed their attention to the economical and political development of a country which proved more and more successful as years went by; they had been filled with admiration for that nation, "the only one on earth which had succeeded in regulating the power of kings by resisting it," "the freest country in the world, without excepting any

republic."<sup>10</sup> That admirably well regulated land showed indeed some lack of orthodox discipline in religion and philosophy, but neither Montesquieu nor Voltaire were inclined to find fault with it on that account; as for its contempt for the classical discipline of the rules, while it had been the source of many "irregular beauties" in its literature, it might happily be considered (so Voltaire thought) as a thing of the past.

The second generation of French writers who became interested in England, and, deriving inspirations from its genius, rose to fame after 1750, are men of an altogether different stamp. Diderot and Rousseau, whose friendship, begun in 1742, lasted some fifteen years,<sup>11</sup> were both thoroughly plebeian, and full of the qualities as well as the shortcomings of a popular origin: naturally inclined to radicalism in thought, and hostile to the spirit of compromise, more impatient of limitations on equality than of any restraints on liberty, they found little to admire

<sup>10</sup> Voltaire, *Lettres philos.*, VIII (Lanson ed., vol. I, p. 89); and Montesquieu, *Notes sur l'Angleterre*, towards the end (1830 edit., vol. VIII, p. 157).

<sup>11</sup> J. J. Rousseau, *Confessions*, Garnier ed., p. 265.

in a political constitution which seemed to have been framed for the exclusive benefit of an oligarchy of nobles and "bourgeois." Their logical minds, following their proletarian aspirations, carried them beyond all political systems then existing, towards democratic conceptions which had not yet been tested by experience. In the same way, the comfortable beliefs of Deism, the frigid tenets of "natural religion," did not hold them long. But, in matters of literature, their interest was aroused by English originality; and that profound, unfeigned sympathy developed almost into worship for the most sentimental, moral, and realistic novelist of England, the plebeian Richardson.

Only, whereas Rousseau tried to minimize his indebtedness to Richardson in the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, while indeed he did not owe much to Locke in his *Emile*, or to other English writers in the remainder of his works, because he was not familiar with English books in the original, Diderot lavishly praised his foreign models, enjoyed among his contemporaries a reputation for English scholarship, and must have read almost as abundantly in English as in his



native tongue. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that he owed more to English than to French thought, and that without his early knowledge of English, and his acquaintance with whatever had been or was being written in this language by philosophers, scientists, novelists, dramatists, poets, and critics, he could not have been the prolific writer, original thinker, and powerful leader that he eventually became.

This statement, it is hoped, will be found to be borne out by the results of the researches embodied in this book. The somewhat fragmentary nature of the subject, which is due to the great diversity of Diderot's intellectual pursuits, and to the restricted viewpoint from which they are here considered, compelled the adoption of a very discursive method of investigation. But we have endeavored to introduce some unity in the presentation of the various aspects of Diderot's indebtedness to English thought by constantly keeping them under one view, namely, their relation to Diderot's philosophic message. This message is, in philosophy and art, what has become known in the nine-

teenth century as Positivism and Realism, respectively. Yet, as these general tendencies, in which we now sum up Diderot's intellectual personality, were some time in taking shape, and did not from the beginning appear fully formed in him, since also they were not infrequently subjected by him to cross-examination and criticism, it has been easy for those who for other reasons do not like him to charge him with obscurity and self-contradiction.

References made between parentheses in our text are to the volumes and pages of the latest and most complete edition of Diderot's *Works*, by Messrs J. Assézat and M. Tourneux (20 vols, Paris, Garnier, 1875-1877), in which the classification of our author's writings is made according to their matter: Philosophy, Sciences, Belles-Lettres, Art Criticism, Encyclopedia, Correspondence. Whether we start from the chronological or from the methodical order of Diderot's productions, our study of his indebtedness to English thinkers falls naturally into the following parts: the philosopher and moralist, the scientist, the Encyclopedist, the

dramatist, the novelist, and the critic. To these chapters it would have been idle to prefix a full biography. What we know of Diderot's life and character, through the *Memoirs* of him written by his daughter, Madame de Vandeul, and his disciple, Naigeon, as well as through the works of contemporaries, will be found excellently expounded in the studies on Diderot of Karl Rosenkranz, Lord Morley, and M. Ducros. But it has seemed interesting, and suited to our purpose, first to trace his general relations to English culture in the eighteenth century; secondly, to outline his personal connections with various Englishmen who journeyed to Paris, and to determine in what manner he reacted under such individual influences: and this is the subject of the first two chapters in this book. In our concluding chapter we have attempted, in summing up what Diderot owed to English philosophy and literature, to indicate how the borrowed elements were transformed by his vigorous, original personality, how he contributed to their diffusion in continental Europe, and lastly how it came to pass

that he met with more sympathetic recognition in Germany and in England than in his native country.

In the appendices will be found a few unpublished letters of Diderot, together with one of Voltaire, and some letters of Diderot that have appeared in print but were not collected in his *Œuvres Complètes*; also a chronological table of his most important writings, and a bibliography.

It is a pleasure for us to return sincere thanks here to M. Maurice Tourneux, the editor of Diderot's *Works* and of the *Correspondance littéraire* by Grimm and Diderot, who helped us with his advice; to Professor George Saintsbury, of the University of Edinburgh, for his kind assistance in having researches made among Hume's manuscripts, and to Mr H. W. Meikle, Lecturer in Scottish History in the same University, for collating Diderot's letters to Hume with the originals; to M. L. Réau, Director of the Institut Français de Saint-Pétersbourg, who obligingly made inquiries for us in Petersburg concerning Diderot's library;

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## CHAPTER I

### DIDEROT'S LIFE AND GENERAL RELATIONSHIP TO ENGLAND

DENIS DIDEROT was born in Langres, in the province of Champagne, on October 5, 1713. The Diderot family must have been an old one in Langres, for its name is a diminutive form of the name of Didier, the patron saint of the ancient city of the *Lingones*. Diderot's father, Didier Diderot, was a cutler, who seems always to have enjoyed the reputation among his neighbors of a skilled workman and a worthy man, and to have deserved the reverent affection of his three children.<sup>1</sup> These were Denis, the philosopher, who was considered more or less as a black sheep in the family until he made its name famous; his sister, a sensible and merry person, "a kind of female Diogenes;" and the brother, the Abbé, succinctly described as "a good Christian, and a bad man."

Young Denis was educated by the Jesuits of

<sup>1</sup> Another child of Didier Diderot, a daughter, entered a convent against the will of her family, and died insane.

his native town. His family cherished the ambition of having him enter the Church and succeed to a canonicate which was held by one of his uncles. But, as he had no taste for the priesthood, his father for a time took him into his workshop, in order to hand down to him the trade which the Diderots had exercised for several generations. Yet cutlery was not, any more than the ecclesiastical career, the destined vocation of the last of the Diderots. He soon dropped the craftman's apron, and returned to his books. Then he planned, we are told, to run away to Paris: in this he was aided and abetted by his Jesuit teachers, who would have liked to train the clever youth for their order. Diderot, however, like many a poor and intelligent lad before and since, was more eager to improve his opportunities and advance in learning as far as he could under the Jesuits, than to become a member of their Society. The plot was discovered by Diderot the father. He assented to the boy's desire for more education, took him to Paris himself, saw him settled, satisfied himself that Denis liked the Collège d'Harcourt and was well thought of by his regents, and then went back home.

From that day it became probable that Denis Diderot would reflect great credit on his family, as a lawyer or a Sorbonic divine, or else great discredit, as a playwright, an actor perhaps, or (worse than all) a philosopher. "The picture of the famous man dying of starvation is constantly placed before the eyes of children by sensible fathers. 'Wretched child, what are you going to do? You are not sure to attain glory, and you rush headlong into poverty.' . . . Such words resound again and again in our homes, but they scarcely convert any but mediocre children; the others let their parents talk, and go whither nature calls them" (*Œuv.*, II, 378). "Had I lived in Athens, I should not have become a Eumolpid, for I have never been very powerfully attracted by the service of the altars; but I should have taken the robe of Aristotle or Plato, or donned the tunic of Diogenes" (III, 75).

As soon as he had completed his course at college, Diderot was placed by his father under the care of Maître Clément du Ris, a gentleman from Langres and an attorney in Paris, in order to study law. But, just as he had dis-



liked theology, so the drudgery of an attorney's office proved very uninteresting to him. He devoted all his spare time to Latin, Greek, and mathematics, which were the foundations of the Jesuits' pedagogy, and in which he was already proficient. "For several years," he says, "I have read a canto of Homer before going to bed, as religiously as a good priest recites his breviary" (III, 478). His curiosity also turned to newer things, for which the traditional system of education then prevalent in France made no provision: such was the study of Italian and English, and probably the rudiments of rationalistic philosophy. Later on, when he had an opportunity to outline a plan of public education, he emphasized the important part which modern languages should play in modern instruction, in words which may be worth repeating to-day:

"French, Italian, English, German are to-day four languages that are almost essential to a man who has enjoyed a liberal education. As nations become more and more civilized, the number of essential languages will increase; for it is most certain that the arts, sciences, and

letters travel, and that it is impossible to fix them." Since, however, the language of a nation is to be mastered for its past as well as for its present riches, the ancient languages were not to be discarded. Then, "by degrees, the mass of knowledge will become too large for the scope of the human mind: confusion and barbarism will have their turn. And that is the true key to the allegorical fable of the Tower of Babel . . ." (III, 422, n.).

Diderot's ambition was not to become a polyglot, and to spend over the chaff of words the valuable years which he wished to devote to the grain of things. In the bulk of essential knowledge which to enlightened minds seemed to grow larger day by day, he had to make a choice: he devoted his greatest efforts to acquiring the mastery of Italian and English, then in fashion, "like the *prétintailles* and the *falbalas*" (IV, 223). Voltaire, in a short piece entitled *Conseils à un journaliste*,<sup>2</sup> wrote in 1737: "A good journalist must know at least Italian and

<sup>2</sup> Voltaire, *Œuvres*, Moland edition, vol. XXII, p. 261. (As a rule we have tried to quote titles of books in their original form, exception being made only when necessary for the sake of clearness.)

English; for there are many works of genius in those languages, and genius can hardly ever be translated. Those are, I think, the two languages of Europe that are most necessary to a Frenchman. The Italians are the first who rescued the arts from barbarism; and there is so much greatness, so much strength of imagination, even in the faults of the English that one cannot too urgently advise the study of their language." When a choice had to be made between Italian and English, the former was more generally sacrificed; witness the Abbé Le Blanc: "We have lately placed the English language in the rank of the learned languages; even the women learn it, and have forsaken Italian in order to study the language of that philosophic nation. There is no provincial Armande or Bélise who does not desire to know it."<sup>3</sup> And the Abbé deplored that "the sex"

<sup>3</sup> Jean Bernard Le Blanc (1707-1781), Letter 62, to Fréret, in his *Lettres d'un Français* (1745), 3 vols; translated into English, as "Letters on the English and French nations: containing curious and useful observations on their constitutions natural and political; nervous and humorous descriptions of the virtues, vices, ridicules and foibles of the inhabitants; critical remarks on their writers; together with moral reflections interspersed

should look for edification and entertainment to wicked English plays and dry English political pamphlets.

Diderot shared, it is true, a rather common belief, that "of all the nations of Europe, the French showed the least aptitude to modern foreign languages" (II, 317). He was mistaking for natural inability what was only the effect of a prolonged national concentration, of a culture too exclusively humanistic, and of that universal attention which foreign nations had for ages given to the French language and French civilization. In periods of intellectual expansion, the French have learned modern languages, whenever it has been necessary or worth while for them to do so. In the seventeenth century, polite society in France had been well versed in the knowledge of Italian and Spanish. We have just seen that English and Italian were deemed indispensable to cultured people in the age of Diderot. And in the nineteenth century English and German throughout the work" (1747), 2 vols.—The general trend of the "moral reflections" is to warn the French against excessive enthusiasm for English things.

were to become familiar not only to the cosmopolitan Madame de Stael, but to a host of poets, historians, and philosophers who looked abroad for new inspirations, new methods, new systems of thought.

In Diderot's lifetime, German was not yet an essential language. Frederick II himself, who liked to play the part of a protector of science and polite literature, was comparable to an Augustus devoid of faith in the resources of his native tongue, who looked abroad for Vergils and Varros to patronize.<sup>4</sup> Diderot in 1770, at the age of fifty-seven, confessed that he did not know a word of German (VI, 401). Yet his great bosom friend, Frédéric-Melchior Grimm, was a German, and through him he became acquainted, not only with various obscure German visitors to Paris, but with personages of importance like the crown princes of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel and of Saxe-Gotha (XI, 382).

<sup>4</sup> See the *Poésies diverses* of the King of Prussia (Berlin, 1760), a curious production, with its condescendingly apologetic preface:

“Ma Muse tudesque et bizarre,  
Jargonnant un français barbare,  
Dit les choses comme elle pent. . . .”

The French language, however, was then sufficient for all intercourse between Frenchmen and Germans, as it is to-day for the relations between the French and the nations of Eastern Europe and the Levant. Had Diderot lived after the age of Lessing, Schiller, Goethe, and Kant, there is no doubt that his versatile genius would have been as greatly interested in their writings as they were in his own. Towards the middle of the eighteenth century, he needed no knowledge of German to read Leibnitz, whose works were written in French, or Gessner's elegies, to which he listened with sympathetic interest as they were orally rendered by his friend Huber (VI, 401); and withal he knew enough Latin and Greek to consult Alsted's *Encyclopædia*, or Brucker's *Historia Critica Philosophiæ*, or any other of "those Germanic compilations, bristling, against all reason and taste, with Hebrew, Arabic, Greek, and Latin, which are very big already, are growing bigger still, will ever grow bigger, and will be all the worse for it" (I, 370).

English works were more attractive, both in form and matter, for Diderot and his contempo-

aries. "England," he wrote, "is the country of philosophers, of curious, systematic minds" (I, 312). A "philosophic breeze," to use D'Argenson's phrase, was blowing from over the Channel.<sup>5</sup> Diderot was just twenty years old when that breeze first raised a great storm in the Parliament of Paris: that judicial body, alarmed by the *nouveautés anglaises*, which seriously threatened both Church and State, the throne and the altar, sentenced Voltaire's *Lettres philosophiques* (1734) to be publicly burned by the hand of the executioner.<sup>6</sup> We may imagine with what feelings the young clerk in the office of M. Clément du Ris heard about that public execution, if he did not witness it

<sup>5</sup> D'Argenson, *Journal et Mémoires*, Rathery ed., 1859-1867, vol. VI, p. 464 (3 sept. 1751): "From England a philosophic wind of free, anti-monarchic government is blowing over to us; it passes into all minds, and it is well known that the world is ruled by opinion. Maybe that government is already arranged in the people's heads, to be put into practice on the first occasion; and perhaps the revolution might take place with less opposition than one thinks. . . ."

<sup>6</sup> The *Lettres philosophiques*, also known as the *Lettres anglaises*, had been published first in English, in London, under the title *Letters concerning the English Nation* (1733).

with his own eyes, as it was performed in state on the grand staircase of the Palais de Justice. Nothing of course could more effectually advertise English ideas than those absurd outbreaks of a tyrannical spirit. While Voltaire was fleeing to the frontiers of France and of the duchy of Lorraine for a place of safety, young Denis no doubt read the condemned book, and found in its deep and witty pages a fuller and more vivid picture than France had ever had before<sup>7</sup> of that philosophic country across the Channel, where people were not persecuted for discussing topics of religion and politics; where toleration reigned, and where all men, being free, "might go to Heaven by whatever path they chose;" where men with property were allowed to participate in the government; where trade was no dishonor, and a rich merchant was held to be of more account than a beggared nobleman; where men of letters received pensions or profitable appointments, and great men

<sup>7</sup> Concerning the Swiss B  at de Muralt, who visited England in 1694-1695, and whose *Lettres sur les Anglais et les Fran  ais et sur les voyages* (1725) influenced his countryman Rousseau more than Diderot, see J. Texte, *J. J. Rousseau*, liv. I, Chap. II, sect. 1.



of all kinds, poets, philosophers, and scientists, were buried with kings at the expense of the nation.

The "Neophyte" in that formidable party of Philosophy, which in France was rising amidst persecution, must have realized then that the "fashion" of learning English corresponded in the French nation to certain greater needs than did the study of Italian, Latin, or Greek. Thirty years later, in 1763, his own experience justified him in repeating, almost in Voltaire's own words:

"There seem to be two countries in Europe in which philosophy is cultivated, France and England. In England, philosophers are honored, respected, they rise to public offices, they are buried with the kings. Do we see that England is any the worse for it? In France, warrants are issued against them, they are persecuted, pelted with pastoral letters, with satires, and libels. They however are the men who enlighten us and uphold the honor of the nation. Am I not right in saying that the French are children who throw stones at their masters?" (II, 80, n.).

In the *Memoir on Diderot* written by Madame de Vandeul, his daughter, we can gather little

information about Diderot's life between 1733 and 1743, when he was in his twenties. We do not know when he left M. Clément's office, to live for years *la vie de Bohême*—not so gay a life as Henri Mürger has made it—a life of penury and hard work. In those lean years, he studied eagerly, learning everything with equal delight, and giving private lessons for a living. It is not too much to allow one whole decade for the acquisition of that amazing amount of knowledge which stood the future editor of the Encyclopedia in good stead, and made him a Philosopher, in the earliest and fullest meaning of the word. Madame de Vandeul, however, tells us how in that needy period he wrote, for fifty *écus* apiece, six sermons for the Jesuit missions in Paraguay; how another time, under the pretence of joining a monastic order, he obtained large sums of money from a certain credulous Frère Ange, which honest Diderot the father refunded; how he gave lessons to such pupils only as were worth teaching, giving up all those whose dulness did not repay his efforts; with several other curious anecdotes which she had heard from her father.

For our present purpose it would be more interesting to know how he learned English, to what extent he knew it, and what English books were his earliest reading. We only know, from himself, that he preferred to use an English-Latin rather than an English-French dictionary, because the sense of Latin words is better determined, less liable to vary with different lexicographers, than the sense of the words in a modern language.<sup>8</sup> Probably he mostly read Locke, Shaftesbury, Newton, Taylor, Rapson, Saunderson, works of philosophy and science which interested him more, and were, idiomatically speaking, easier reading than the lighter forms of literature. It is evident that for the study of English he never had the opportunities which Voltaire enjoyed in his younger days. His life in a miserable quarter of Paris, his needy circumstances, his retired mode of living, make a striking contrast with Voltaire's brilliant successes some twenty years before, when, not yet thirty years old, he was an idol of the

<sup>8</sup> XIV, 438. Gibbon similarly tells us, in his *Memoirs*, that he learned French and Latin together, one language helping the other.

public, moved in the aristocratic spheres of society, and made friends with the exiled Bolingbroke, Lord Stair, and Bishop Atterbury.

It is furthermore worthy of notice that, whereas almost all other great Frenchmen of letters in the eighteenth century visited England at some time or other in their lives, Diderot certainly never crossed the Channel. Voltaire was exiled to England (1726-1729), where he met with as much honor as he had enjoyed at home; Montesquieu travelled through the same country about the same time, in the course of his tour of Europe (1728-1731); and later on, Buffon, Holbach, and Helvétius, visited the land of philosophy, whither Rousseau also journeyed on an ill-fated tour. Diderot alone stayed at home, and would have stayed there all his life, had not gratitude impelled him, when he was sixty years old, to undertake a long journey to visit his imperial benefactress at Petersburg. While the taste for traveling was so prevalent in England that no gentleman was considered really well-educated unless he had accomplished the "Grand Tour," while the French began to share the same desire to look beyond the walls of

their metropolis for new ideas and inspirations, Diderot still thought that there was no place like home. "Traveling is a fine thing; but a man must have lost his father, mother, children, and friends, or never have had any, to wander by profession over the surface of the globe. What would you think," he asked Grimm, "of the owner of an immense palace who would spend all his life ascending and descending, from cellar to attic and from attic to cellar, instead of quietly sitting down in the midst of his family? Such is the image of the traveler" (XI, 218; XVIII, 490).

"Hitherto," he again wrote in 1773, after reading the account of Bougainville's voyage around the world, "the final result of my reflections had always been that a man was nowhere so comfortable as he is at home, a conclusion which I took to be the same for each inhabitant of the earth taken singly, a natural result of that attraction of the soil, which results from the comforts that a man enjoys, and is not certain to find elsewhere" (II, 206, 212).

Besides, had Diderot possessed any fondness for traveling, had he been curious to know

more of foreign nations than what he could compass from books, in his poor study high up in some house along the Rue Mouffetard or the Rue Taranne, how could he have afforded to indulge a taste that was a great deal more expensive in his days than in ours? He had no pecuniary competency to fall back upon, no resources but his learning and the uncongenial labor of tutoring, and, as yet, no illustrious friends who might have facilitated his travels outside of France. Before his journey to Russia, he may indeed have gone for a time as far as Dieppe.<sup>9</sup> But information is lacking on this head, as on almost everything concerning his life between 1733 and 1743.

At the end of this decade, Diderot married Mlle Champion, a poor seamstress, and, if we may believe a parenthetical confession which he makes to Grimm<sup>10</sup> in the *Salon of 1767*, his

\* From some of his criticisms in the *Salons*, it seems difficult to imagine that he had never seen the sea.

\* The light tone of the passage on "ce maudit lien conjugal" has roused the ire of some earnest critics. Compare Thackeray's virulent attack on Sterne, for his playful "*ægroty sum de uxore mea.*" It is a question whether, in the estimate of a man's character, so much should be made of a sally casually thrown out in a piece

marriage influenced and almost determined the main directions in the chaotic currents of his subsequent literary activities. "The necessities of life, which imperiously dispose of us, lead astray the talents which they apply to things foreign to them, and often degrade the talents which chance has employed in the right direction. That is one of the drawbacks of society for which I know of no remedy." A married man cannot follow his personal inclinations, or his vocation. "For is a husband, a father, allowed to be proud, and to be deaf to the complaints, blind to the miseries which surround him? I had arrived in Paris. I was about to don the fur gown and to settle among the doctors in the Sorbonne. I meet on my way a woman of angelic beauty. . . ." We marry, four children are born to us, "and there am I, compelled to forsake mathematics, of which I was fond, Homer and Vergil whom I always carried about in my pocket, the theatre, for which I had some inclination; glad enough to undertake the *En-* which it was not the author's desire ever to see published. Diderot makes a similar complaint about his domestic life, in a more discreet tone, to Mlle Volland, in 1765 (XIX, 149, 159).

*cyclopédie*, to which I shall have sacrificed twenty-five years of my life" (XI, 265).

He had to begin with less interesting undertakings than the *Encyclopédie*. As English books were in demand and it was comparatively easy for a Frenchman who knew English to turn his knowledge to some account, Diderot, to support his family, readily turned to the resource of writing translations for publishers. Many books, from the English language or about the English, were put forth to satisfy the general curiosity which Voltaire's *Lettres philosophiques* had aroused. The Abbé Prévost, who between 1733 and 1740 had been publishing a periodical, *Le Pour et le Contre*, expressly devoted to the literary news from England, had now begun to translate the novels of Richardson. Other abbés, like Desfontaines and Le Blanc, and a host of poor hacks, were hard at work along the same line. Diderot in 1743 translated Temple Stanyan's *Grecian History*; then, with the assistance of two other translators more destitute even than himself, the huge *Medicinal Dictionary* of Dr Robert James, which appeared in



French in six volumes in 1746. What merits in those works attracted a Parisian publisher's attention to them and induced him to venture on having them translated, it is now difficult to determine. These translations, naturally, have not been included in Diderot's works, and it is doubtful whether we should have known anything about them had they not been mentioned by Madame de Vandeul. Some parts of Dr James's Dictionary later found their place in the contributions of Diderot to the *Encyclopédie*. The only interest which to-day might attach to these translations is, that they might enable us to ascertain how accurately, after abundant reading, Diderot had acquired the English language about the year 1745.

Having become known among Parisian publishers as a man of wide information, something of a *savant*, and an English scholar, Diderot received the distinction of being chosen in 1745 to be the editor of the *Encyclopédie*. The history of that epoch-making work, which had originated in a plan of translating into French the two volumes of Chambers's *Cyclopædia* (1728), will be dwelt on at appropriate length

in a subsequent chapter.<sup>11</sup> It suffices here to say that by 1747 the son of the cutler at Langres found himself definitely settled in Paris, and starting upon a long and stormy life of literary labors.

This work for the *Encyclopédie* supplied him with what he really needed most, beside his daily bread. It gave definiteness of aim to the rather exuberant and erratic faculties of his mind, and induced some trace of discipline in the management of his extraordinarily versatile and restless intellect. Too much pity need not therefore be wasted on him on account of his regrets concerning talents misapplied and natural gifts neglected. In a way, it was better for him not to have devoted himself entirely to the stage; and, on the other hand, the general trend of his philosophy enables us to make a safe surmise that, had he ever found a place among the doctors of theology in the Sorbonne, it would not have been for long. The more fully one becomes acquainted with Diderot, the stronger does the conviction grow that, if no Encyclopedia had existed before him, one would have

<sup>11</sup> Chapter V, *The Encyclopedist*.

had to be invented for him; much as Voltaire thought it morally necessary that "If there were no God, one would have to be invented." Diderot was happily possessed with the active curiosity, the catholicity of taste, the unrelenting energy, and the sociable and patient disposition that must go to the making of an Encyclopedia editor; and that "rage for study" which, as he tells us, characterized him when he was thirty years old (XX, 80), had fitted him for a task formidable at all times, more formidable still when no great modern encyclopedia was yet in existence.

The remainder of Diderot's literary activity, outside of the *Encyclopédie*, is, however, worthy of attention. While he was engaged in starting this great work, writing its *Prospectus* (1750), and preparing its first two volumes for publication (1751-1752), he tried his hand at independent writing, and learned by experience that it was, to say the least, a hazardous undertaking. He always had a sort of shamefacedness about his encyclopedic work, for though he considered the *Encyclopédie* a highly useful undertaking, bound to be exceedingly beneficial to man-

kind, yet the kind of labor it entailed smacked too much of mere compilation to satisfy his ambition. Before 1747, he had, as it were, felt his way by publishing—in 1745—a paraphrase of Shaftesbury's *Essay on Virtue or Merit*, with all the reserves and rhetorical precautions of a man who had "the courage of his opinions and the fear of their consequences";<sup>12</sup>—in 1746, a series of *Pensées philosophiques* which form a striking contrast with the prudent orthodoxy of the notes subjoined by him to the paraphrase of Shaftesbury;—in 1748, a merely licentious book entitled *Les Bijoux Indiscrets*, yet interspersed with a greater number of interesting philosophic digressions than most merry tales of the same sort. This last "display of intemperate wit that had escaped him," as he pleaded later, might have passed unperceived by a censorship which, although hostile to the freedom of the press on religious and political

<sup>12</sup> This is Brunetière's characterization of Bayle's and Voltaire's attitude. It is not without analogy with the *mot* of the Jesuit Père Garasse concerning free-thinkers: "Faggots will always be afraid of fire,"—a natural thing, as long as there are stakes burning somewhere about.

questions, was as a rule a great deal more indulgent than many modern governments in matters affecting moral propriety. But Diderot went too far when he boldly expounded the plausibility of atheism in his *Letter on the Blind, for the use of those who see*, in 1749. On July 24, 1749, he was arrested, and, as Voltaire had once said of himself, "provided by the king with free lodgings in one of his châteaux;" in other words, he was imprisoned at Vincennes for an indefinite period of time. On November 3 of the same year, he was freed, after repeated requests to the government from the booksellers, his employers, who needed him sorely. Yet he could not forbear publishing another *Letter*, this time *On the Deaf and Dumb, for the use of those who hear and speak* (1751); but this, as it happened, did not involve him in new troubles. All the vexations he was to endure henceforth were solely connected with the *Encyclopédie*. In 1752, he wrote the third part of an *Apology for the Abbé de Prades*, one of his fellow-laborers who had written articles on theology, and who, despite all apologies, was condemned by the Sorbonne and had to flee to Berlin. In

1754, Diderot gave out his *Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature*, an homage to Bacon, and a proof of the close intellectual intercourse in which the French philosopher for some years had lived with the author of the *Novum Organum*.

Those first ten years in the eye of the public must have satisfied Diderot's craving for an author's fame. After 1755, if we except his two attempts in the drama, and in his last years, an *Essay on the life of Seneca and the reigns of Claudius and Nero* (1778), he did not publish anything beside the bulky volumes of the *Encyclopédie*, the last volume of text appearing in 1765, and the last volume of plates in 1772. In this period of his life, it was his policy to be ignored (III, 379).

Thus it is that so few of his writings were known to his contemporaries. For reasons of prudence, and out of contempt for present fame, perhaps also because he could not bring himself to finish the various works he began *en baguenaudant*, Diderot after 1755 was content to write for himself and a chosen few. We must imagine him as he describes himself in his

## DIDEROT AND ENGLISH THOUGHT

*Refutation of Helvétius*, at his desk, clad in the old dressing-gown which he has celebrated, curtains drawn, lamp lighted, "occupé à décomposer des idées." This is the true Diderot, *ecco il vero Pulcinella*: reading, analyzing all sorts of notions, the most trifling as well as the most respected, remaking a whole book by way of amending it, challenging dogmatic assertions, whether orthodox or revolutionary, writing "the diary of his reading," like Montaigne, testing theories in the light of free examination, in the spirit of Descartes, Bayle, and Locke. This Diderot *intime* enjoyed the rare liberty of thinking and writing with absolute freedom, more freely than any of his English masters, not because wealth or a safe retreat made him independent, like Voltaire, but because, not caring for publication, he had no reading public to humor, and no "consequences" to fear.

There is good reason to believe that, during the very active period of his life which extends from 1748 to 1760, while he became famous both as the editor of the *Encyclopédie* and as the originator of new dramatic theories, Diderot

knew England mostly through books; very little, if at all, by actual intercourse with English people traveling in France.<sup>13</sup> When he met some Englishmen later on, in the social circles which welcomed them after the Treaty of Paris, we are not aware that he was able to converse with them in their own language; at any rate, in what we know of his correspondence with them, he always expressed himself in French.

It was in 1759 and 1760 that he had the occasion, apparently for the first time, to obtain authentic particulars of the manners and institutions of Great Britain, concerning which he had hitherto been content to read the accounts given by Muralt, Voltaire, Prévost, and the Abbé Le Blanc. The curious interest with which he relates to Sophie Volland his conversations with "father Hoop" a Scotchman,<sup>14</sup> shows how little he knew about England at that time, and how eager he was to know more.

Hoop was a typical Englishman, according to the notions entertained of their neighbors by the French about the middle of the eighteenth

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter II, *Diderot's English friends*.

<sup>14</sup> For more particulars concerning this great friend of Diderot, see Chapter II, pp. 86 ff.



century. He was grave and taciturn, and suffered from that peculiar form of melancholy which Voltaire in a famous piece,<sup>15</sup> and the Abbé Prévost in his novel entitled *Cléveland*, had described as characteristic of the English temperament,—*spleen*.

"You do not know what *spleen* is, the English 'vapeurs'; I did not know either," Diderot writes to Mlle Volland (Oct. 31, 1760). "I asked our Scotchman about it in our last walk, and this is what he told me:

"For the last twenty years I have had a more or less troublesome feeling of general discomfort; my head is never free. It is so heavy at times that it feels like a weight which drags me forward, and would carry me out of a window into the street, or headlong to the

<sup>15</sup> Voltaire, *Mélanges*, Moland edition, vol. XXII, pp. 21-22. His humorous account of the tragic effects of the east wind on the morale of Londoners seems likely enough; but the story of the unfortunate Molly leaves the reader under a strong impression that Voltaire was made, by his English friends, the victim of a hoax which he never suspected.

Prévost, in his *Histoire de Monsieur Cléveland, fils naturel de Cromwell* (1732-1739), had said of spleen that it was "a kind of delirious frenzy, which is more common among the English than among the other nations of Europe." The word *spleen* was entered in the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* in 1798.

bottom of a river, if I stood on the bank. I have gloomy ideas, I am sad and bored; I feel uncomfortable everywhere, I wish for nothing. I am unable to wish, I try to enjoy myself and to be busy, but all in vain; the mirth of others grieves me, I suffer when I hear them laughing or talking. Do you know that kind of stupid or discontented feeling one has on waking after sleeping too long? That is my usual state; life is distasteful to me; the least changes in the atmosphere are to me like violent shocks; I cannot remain in one place, but must be going, I do not know whither. That is how I have gone around the world. I do not sleep well, have no appetite, cannot digest; I am comfortable only in a stage-coach. I am just the reverse of other people; I dislike what they like, I like what they dislike; there are days when I hate the light, at other times it makes me feel safe, and if I suddenly entered darkness, I should think I was falling into an abyss. My nights are disturbed by a thousand weird dreams. . . . But,' he added, 'the most annoying sensation is to know one's own stupidity, to know that you were not born stupid, to wish to enjoy your intellect, to endeavor to find amusement, enter into conversation, bestir yourself, and finally to be overwhelmed by the effort. Then it is impossible to depict the mental grief you feel at being hopelessly condemned to be what you are not. Sir,' he then added with an

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exclamation that rent my soul, 'I was gay once, I used to skim along like you over the earth, I enjoyed the sight of a fine day, or a beautiful woman, I enjoyed a good book, a pleasant walk, agreeable conversation, the spectacle of nature, the intercourse of wise men, the comedy of fools: I still recollect that happiness; I feel that I must give it up.'

"Well, with all that, dear friend," Diderot goes on to say, "this man is still most agreeable to deal with. He has kept I know not what of his former gaiety which still comes out in his expression. His sadness is pleasantly peculiar, and is not sad. He is never worse than when he is silent; and so many people would be very decent if they were like old Hoop when he is bad!" (XVIII, 530).

A few days before (Oct. 13, 1760), Diderot and his Scotchman had talked politics, and Diderot seems to have learned much: "I asked him a thousand questions about the English Parliament. It is a body composed of some five hundred persons. The place where it holds its sittings is a vast building; six or seven years ago everybody could be admitted there, and the most important affairs of State were discussed under the very eyes of the nation assembled and sitting in large galleries above the heads of the

representatives." (The debates of Parliament were then no longer public, for reasons of State.) "Do you think, my friend," Diderot asks with naïve confidence, "that a man would dare to propose a harmful project or oppose a useful measure in front of a whole nation, and acknowledge himself wicked or stupid?" (XVIII, 488). The use of shorthand to record parliamentary debates was another foreign wonder to Holbach's circle, and the philosopher marveled at a secret which he thought had been lost since the days of Cicero.

But what about the question of "merit or virtue"? Did the Britons live up to their reputation in this respect? The Scotchman began to dispel Diderot's illusions on this score. London society life was less peculiar than English political life, for it appeared to be much like Parisian life in some ways. Diderot told amazing stories of the extravagance of "la Deschamps," a much talked-of actress; but they were matched by Hoop's recollection of a famous Miss Phillips, who showed "un esprit étonnant" by practising in a masterly manner the art of blackmailing noblemen, as a short and easy

way to raise money when she wanted some (Oct. 28, 1760; XVIII, 526). Yet such examples, Hoop adds for the honor of his country, were comparatively rare in England.

Thirteen years later, in his journey through Holland, Diderot relieved the tedium of travel in a stage-coach by conversing on the same subject with an English lady. English manners, it appears by her report, were no better than the French: the only difference was, that in Paris the dangerous moral influence was that of women; in London, it was that of men. Whereupon Diderot passes on to a discussion of the anatomy and the ethics of the Hottentots, with a young Englishman, named Gordon, who had visited South Africa.<sup>16</sup>

As he acquired a more substantial and direct knowledge of England, after 1760, Diderot lost indeed some long cherished notions about English virtue, for which Shaftesbury was partly responsible: but, at the same time, he was filled with sympathy and respect for those men who had the honor of sharing in the managment

<sup>16</sup> Whether this was the "Colonel Gordon" to whom Madame Geoffrin refers in her letters to Hume, or some other, we have not been able to ascertain.

of the public affairs of their country, his "dear philosopher" David Hume, secretary of the English embassy in Paris, and his "very dear and honored Gracchus," John Wilkes.<sup>17</sup> The latter excited his enthusiasm, for had he not dared to brave his king and make a stand for "liberty,"—a wonderful example of *hardiesse anglaise*? While the former gave him occasion to wonder when philosophers would be entrusted with responsible positions in the French administration. The time was near for that honor to devolve on a Turgot, a Necker; but the French monarchy was to find then that it was too late.

The halo of glory which still surrounded the parliamentary system of England was beginning to be obscured by many shadows in its foreign and colonial policy. After 1763, Great Britain appeared to Frenchmen as a power which for years had been France's relentless enemy on the Continent, and her triumphant rival in the struggle for colonial expansion. Diderot, while unable to sympathize with the exclusive, narrow-minded, bitter spirit of so-called patriotism

<sup>17</sup> For more details on the relations of Diderot with Hume and Wilkes, see Chapter II.

which long-protracted wars had fostered in the less enlightened part of the French and the English nations, could no longer share that other excess, a philosophic kind of cosmopolitanism founded on the negation of patriotism, which extolled everything connected with England and reviled everything French. An undiscerning "Anglomania" would have been as unbecoming to a truly philosophic intellect as that uncompromising hatred and contempt of foreigners which characterized, for instance, a Smollett and a Samuel Johnson.<sup>18</sup>

"All nations," he wrote in the *Encyclopédie*,<sup>19</sup> "have fairly just ideas to-day concerning their neighbors, and they consequently have less of the fatherland enthusiasm than in the ages of ignorance; there is not much enthusiasm when there is much enlightenment; it is almost always the impulse of a soul full rather of passion than of knowledge; by comparing in all

<sup>18</sup> He tried to convince the Russian Princess Dashkoff that her exclusive feelings of admiration for the English blinded her to the merits of the French; but he left to his less intelligent disciple Naigeon, by whom the Russian Czernischew had already been "trounced" (in a literary way) for placing England above France, the task of upbraiding Helvétius for a similar offence.

<sup>19</sup> Article "Législateur," *Œuv.*, XV, 434.

countries laws with laws, talents with talents, manners with manners, nations will find so little reason to prefer themselves to others that, although they will preserve for their own land that love which is the product of personal interest, they will at least cease to entertain that enthusiasm which is the result of exclusive esteem." And he proceeds to say, with more optimism than true insight: "It would not be possible nowadays, through supposititious charges, and political tricks, to inspire people with such violent forms of national hatred as one formerly did; the slanders published by our neighbors against us have hardly any effect, except on a small, despicable part of the inhabitants of a capital [London] which contains the lowest kind of rabble as well as the noblest population."

The fanatic London mobs whose patriotic passion could be fanned to fury by the introduction of French dancers on Garrick's stage, those "true Britons" whose ancient hatred for France is displayed in innumerable skits and songs of that time, were not without equivalents in Paris. Sébastien Mercier, in his *Tableau de Paris* (1781), tells us how gaping audiences, in the Jardin du Luxembourg, listened to the harangues of a patriotic Abbé, who used to bawl repeatedly that if only "thirty thousand men"



marched on London the war would soon be at an end; and how, in consequence, his admirers conferred on him the name of the "Abbé Thirty-Thousand-Men."

That Diderot one day felt ashamed of having too highly extolled England during the earlier part of his life, is shown by a curious recantation, in his *Second Entretien sur le Fils Naturel*. In the same passage he illustrates the truth that "there are good people everywhere," and that feelings of kindness and humanity are not to be claimed as belonging to one nation alone, to the exclusion of all others. In his play, an old servant, André, is supposed to have been captured at sea with his master, and both had been afterwards despoiled of all they had in the English pontoons; but a kind-hearted Englishman had eventually obtained their freedom and provided them with all they wanted: "Now," André says to Dorval [Diderot], who has alluded to those facts in his domestic tragedy, "you are a little too concise about the good deeds of the Englishman who succored us. Sir, there are honest people everywhere. . . . But you are much altered from what you used

to be, if what is also said about you is true."<sup>20</sup> "And what else do people say?" "That you have been madly infatuated with those people." "André!" "That you looked upon their country as the refuge of liberty, the land of virtue, invention, originality." "André!" "Now it annoys you. Well, let us not talk about it any more" (VII, 110). Let us rather talk, he says, of an English servant's charity to him, which was as worthy to be put on record as the English gentleman's generosity.

Several passages in Diderot's *Réfutation de l'ouvrage d'Helvétius intitulé L'Homme* are devoted to criticizing the idea that the best form of government was the régime of a "good tyrant," that is, an unlimited, enlightened monarchy. This ideal of a bygone age, which Frederick II and Catherine II had been refurbishing of late, and which probably was not altogether foreign to the policy of the "royal prerogative" pursued by George III with such disastrous results, had found defenders in the camp of philosophy. Diderot disliked Frederick, and did not care if he knew it. He had

\* It has just been said that Dorval had become a free-thinker.

accepted Catherine's protection, but was doomed to fail in his futile attempts to advise her and win her over to plans of philosophic and truly far-sighted reforms for Russia. As for England, ominous signs were already appearing in her political sky, and Diderot wrote: "Suppose the English had had three successive Elizabeths, they would be the lowest slaves in Europe" (II, 382).

Helvétius, who had fled to England when his book *De l'Esprit* was condemned in France, had been handsomely treated in London. Naturally, he had come back as pleased with England and as dissatisfied with France as Voltaire in 1729. "Poor Helvétius," said Holbach, "he has seen nothing else in England than the persecution of his book in France." Now Holbach, who was one of Diderot's great friends, and who had entertained most of the distinguished English visitors who had come to the French capital after the Treaty of Paris, went to England in his turn in 1765. But he brought back the most unfavorable impressions of the aspect of the country, its climate, its wealth, and the proverbial *tristesse* of its inhabitants. Diderot

summed up those impressions for his friend Sophie Volland (Sept. 20, 1765) with the faithful accuracy of one who has learnt something new and well worth recording:

“The Baron has returned from England: he had gone to that country favorably prejudiced; there he has met with the pleasantest reception, enjoyed the best of health, and yet he has come back dissatisfied; dissatisfied with the country, which he does not think so thickly populated nor so well tilled as people said; dissatisfied with the buildings, in which the affectation of imitating nature is worse than the monotonous symmetry of art; dissatisfied with a taste which piles up in palaces the excellent, the good, the bad, the detestable, all pell mell; dissatisfied with the amusements, which look like religious ceremonies; dissatisfied with the people, on whose faces one never sees confidence, friendship, mirth, sociability, but which all bear this inscription: *What is there in common between you and me?*—dissatisfied with the great, who are sullen, cold, haughty, disdainful and vain, and the lowly, who are harsh, insolent, and barbaric; dissatisfied with the dinners between friends where each one takes his place according to his rank, and where formality and ceremony sit by the side of each guest; dissatisfied with the meals at inns where one is well and quickly served, but without any affability. I heard him

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praise nothing but the conveniences for traveling; he says that there is not one village, not even on a by-road, where you would not find four or five post-chaises and twenty horses ready to start. He traveled through the whole province of Kent, one of the most fertile in England; he claims that it is not to be compared with our province of Flanders. In that English trip he has been filled anew with fondness for living in France. He confessed to us that every moment he found himself saying in his innermost heart: 'O Paris, when shall I see thee again? O French people, indeed you are very light and giddy, but you are a hundred times better than these morose, sad thinkers over here.' He claims that only in France do people drink Champagne wine, that only here people are gay, full of laughter and self-enjoyment" (XIX, 179).

These regretful longings for Paris were not unusual, and were indulged in even by many Englishmen, at a time when the attraction of Paris was greater than it has ever been. In the preceding year, for instance, Lord Holderness similarly wrote to David Hume: "... There is something in the plan of society in France so entirely adapted to my taste, that I must feel the want of it. Here, my pleasure is retreat

and contemplation; there 'twas company and conversation. I suppose there is something in our natural as well as political constitution, that renders the ease of life, which is so universal in France, difficult, if not impossible here. In most respects, the English seem fit for society. They are naturally good-natured, and commonly not ignorant; and the many easy fortunes amongs us ought to facilitate our communication with each other; instead of which *chacun boude chez soi*."<sup>21</sup>

Concerning the economical, political, educational and social conditions in England, Holbach was even less enthusiastic than about the English climate and temperament:

"Do not believe," Diderot writes to Mlle Voland (Oct. 6, 1765), "that the repartition of wealth is unequal in France only. There are two hundred English lords who have each an income of six, seven, eight, nine, up to eighteen hundred thousand *livres*; there is a numerous clergy which owns, as ours does, one quarter of the property in the State, but it contributes in

<sup>21</sup> In J. H. Burton, *Letters of Eminent Persons addressed to D. Hume*, 1849, p. 72.—Lord Marishal, also writing to Hume (Oct. 28, 1763), thinks Paris a more comfortable place than Edinburgh for thinking freely.

proportion to the public charges, while ours does not; there are merchants who are extravagantly wealthy; you may imagine how little is left for the other citizens. The monarch seems to have his hands free to do good and bound for evil; but he is as much the master of everything as any sovereign, and more. Elsewhere the court commands, and is obeyed. There, it corrupts and does what it pleases, and the corruption of the subjects is perhaps worse, in the long run, than tyranny.<sup>22</sup> There is no public education. The colleges, sumptuous buildings, palaces which might be compared with our Château des Tuileries, are occupied by rich, lazy fellows who sleep and get drunk through a part of the day, and spend the other part knocking into shape a few apprentices to the ministry. The gold which abundantly flows into the capital from the provinces and all the lands of the earth raises wages to an exorbitant level, encourages smuggling, and causes the manufactures to decay. Whether it be an effect of the climate, or of the use of beer and strong spirits, of coarse meat, of everlasting fogs, of the coal smoke by which they are always en-

<sup>22</sup> Montesquieu, in his *Notes on England*, mentions this tradition of political corruption.—See to the same effect D'Argenson, *Journal et Mémoires*, Rathery edit., vol. 5, p. 89 (Oct., 1747): "[The English], with their greed and their fondness for opposing their own government, yet are duped by a king who distorts their Constitution by bribing the deputies of the government."

shrouded, these people are sad and melancholy. Their gardens are cut with winding, narrow paths; everywhere you are made to feel that the host hides himself and wishes to be alone. There you find a Gothic temple; elsewhere a grotto, a Chinese hut, ruins, obelisks, caves, tombs. A private man of wealth has had a large space planted with cypresses; among those trees he has scattered busts of philosophers, funeral urns, antique marbles, on which one reads: *Diis Manibus*, 'To the Manes.' What the Baron calls a Roman cemetery, that gentleman calls the Elysium. But what above all characterizes that national melancholy, is their behavior in those immense, sumptuous buildings which they have erected to Pleasure.<sup>23</sup> There you could hear the trotting of a mouse. A hundred women, erect and silent, walk there around an orchestra built in the middle, where the most delightful music is played. The Baron compares those rounds to the seven processions of the Egyptians around the mausoleum of Osiris. They have public gardens that are not much frequented; on the other hand, the people are not more densely crowded in the streets than in Westminster, a famous abbey adorned with the funeral monuments of all the great men of the country. A charming *mot* of my friend Garrick is, that London is good for the English, but Paris is good for everybody. When the

<sup>23</sup> Vauxhall, etc.



Baron called on that famous player, the latter led him by an underground passage to the end of an island watered by the Thames. There he found a cupola raised on columns of black marble, and, under that cupola, in white marble, the statue of Shakespeare. 'There,' said Garrick to him, 'is the tribute of gratefulness which I owe to the man who has made my reputation, my fortune, and my talent.'

"The Englishman is a gambler; he stakes frightful sums of money. He plays without speaking, loses without complaining, wastes in one instant all his resources; nothing is more common there than to find a man, not more than thirty years old, who has become insensible to riches, the table, women, study, even philanthropy. *Ennui* seizes them in the midst of pleasures, and leads them into the Thames, unless they prefer to take the muzzle of a pistol between their teeth. In a remote spot of St. James' Park, there is a pool reserved for women by an exclusive privilege: that is where they go to drown themselves. Listen to a fact, which might well fill with sadness a sensitive soul. The Baron was taken to the house of a charming man, full of kindness and courtesy, affable, learned, wealthy, and honored; that man appeared to him to be after his own heart, and the closest friendship sprang up between them; they lived together, and parted with grief. The Baron came back to France; his first care was to thank the Englishman for the manner in

which he had been received at his house, and to repeat the feelings of attachment and esteem which he had vowed for him. His letter was half written when he heard that, two days after his departure from London, that man had blown out his brains with a pistol. What is most peculiar, however, is that this weariness of life which takes them from country to country does not leave them, and that often an Englishman who travels is simply a man who leaves his country to go and kill himself elsewhere" (XIX, 182 ff.).

This propensity of the English to suicide, which some of their writers acknowledged as a national characteristic,<sup>24</sup> had just been illustrated by the case of an Englishman who, after an unsuccessful attempt to drown himself in the Seine, had given a great deal of trouble to the English Embassy in the matter of his rescue from the French law: Hume, as secretary of

<sup>24</sup> Richardson's *Pamela* (Leslie Stephen edit., vol. III, p. 101), in her criticism of *The Distrest Mother*, Phillips's translation of Racine's *Andromaque*, deplors the immoral example given by a tragic heroine, Hermione, to "such a gloomy, saturnine nation as ours, where self-murders are more frequent than in all the Christian world besides."—In the *Encyclopédie*, article "Suicide" (*Œuv.*, XVII, 234-237), Diderot discusses English authorities on the subject, among others Dr. Donne's *Saddevaros* (1700).

the Embassy, "had been obliged to call twenty times on the Premier Président before he could make him understand that there was no stipulation, in any of the treaties between France and England, forbidding an Englishman to drown himself in the Seine under penalty of hanging" (XIX, 184).

"The English have, like ourselves, a mania for converting people," Diderot goes on; and he introduces several stories about missionaries and savages, one of which he had heard from Hume, all tending to show what a ludicrous construction is apt to be put on some Christian doctrine or sacrament by Cannibal or Huron converts. And yet, in spite of the missionary zeal which had inspired the foundation of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel,<sup>25</sup> "the Christian religion is almost extinct in England. The Deists there are without number; there are hardly any atheists; those who are such conceal the fact. 'Atheist' and 'criminal' are for them almost synonymous terms" (XIX, 185). Paris evidently contained at that

<sup>25</sup> Noticed by Diderot, after Chambers, in the *Encyclopédie*: see Chapter V, *The Encyclopedist*.

time fewer deists than England, and more atheists, who did not take much trouble to hide their creed: Hume soon found this out at the dinners of Baron d'Holbach. Diderot concludes:

“A nation which thinks that good people are produced by believing in a God, and not through sound laws, does not seem to me very far advanced. I think of the existence of God, in relation to a nation, as I do of marriage. The latter as an institution, the former as a notion, are excellent for three or four persons of sound intellect, but fatal to the common run of men. The vow of indissoluble marriage makes, and is bound to make, almost as many wretches as there are married people. The belief in a God makes, and is bound to make, almost as many fanatics as there are believers. Wherever a God is admitted, there is worship; wherever there is worship, the natural order of moral duties is subverted, and ethics corrupted. Sooner or later, a moment comes when the notion which had prevented a man from stealing a shilling will cause a hundred thousand men to be slaughtered. Fine compensation!”

Whose authority was Diderot inclined to accept, the pessimistic views of Holbach, or the enthusiastic encomiums of England by Helvétius?

Helvétius, we are told (XIX, 187), was madly enthusiastic over England, even before he had visited it. Later on, at a time when the prestige of England as an admirably well-governed country was fast waning in the minds of his contemporaries, when her difficulties with her American colonies were increasing, and had begun to darken the glory so lately acquired by the Treaty of Paris (1763), Helvétius had written in his book *On Man* (1772):

“To what cause should one ascribe the extreme power of England?—To her government.”

And to this Diderot retorted (*Refutation of Helvétius's book "On Man,"* 1773–1774):

“But to what cause should one ascribe the poverty of Scotland and Ireland, and the absurdity of the present war against the colonies? To the greed of the merchants in the metropolis. —People praise that nation for its patriotism. I challenge anyone to show me, in ancient or modern history, an example of such national selfishness, or of more marked anti-patriotism. —I imagine this people under the emblem of a robust child, born with four arms, in whom one arm tears off the other three.”

Another blot in the scutcheon of England,

according to him, was the peculiarly cruel treatment which negro slaves suffered in the British colonies.

Yet while he freely criticized the policies of England and was siding with Burke, Wilkes and other "friends of liberty" on the question of the American colonies, Diderot paid a glowing tribute to the part played by England, and generally by the countries of Europe in which the Reformation had prevailed, in the emancipation and the enlightening of the intellect of man. In his *Essai sur les études en Russie*, in which he gave the first outline of the *Plan d'une Université pour le Gouvernement de Russie* (1775) which Catherine II had asked him to write, he said:

"When we glance over the progress of the human mind since the invention of the art of printing, after that long succession of centuries during which it had remained buried in the profoundest darkness, we notice at once that, after the revival of letters in Italy, it was in the Protestant countries that the best schools were established, rather than in the lands which have preserved the Roman religion, and that to this day those schools have made the most remarkable progress. I shall not enlarge upon this

assertion in order to prove it, but it will suffice to observe that the spirit of the Catholic clergy, which in all times has secured control of public education, is entirely opposed to the progress of enlightenment and reason, while everything favors it in Protestant countries, and that the question here is not whether in Catholic countries there have not been some very great men since the Renaissance of letters, but whether the majority, the main body of each nation, has become more enlightened and sensible: for it is the privilege of a minority of great minds not to resemble their age, and nothing in their case can be accepted as the rule. Now we see that, since the time of the Reformation, all Protestant countries have made a rapid advance toward a better order, that the absurdities and prejudices contrary to good sense have noticeably diminished there, and that there is not one among them which is not more flourishing than any Catholic country that we may compare with it, in proportion respectively to their advantages and the condition in which each ought to be. We may even add that the Catholic lands have profited by the light reflected on them from Protestant countries; that the disappearance of prejudice, buried by reason in the lands where an ambitious clergy no longer had any interest or credit to uphold it, has brought about the shame and finally the ruin of the same prejudice in the neighboring country, to the greatest displeasure of the priests. To all those who have

eyes, it is clear that, without the English, reason and philosophy would still be in the most contemptible infancy in France, and that their true originators among us, Montesquieu and Voltaire, have been the disciples and followers of the philosophers and great men of England.<sup>26</sup> It is therefore in Protestant countries that we must look for the best and wisest institutions for the instruction of youth" (III, 415).

Thus, in the last decade of his life, Diderot still entertained feelings akin to veneration for the English masters of French thought, while, in relation to the contemporary social, political, and even cultural condition of England, he had reached a state of comparative scepticism. He readily fell in with the great enthusiasm which the revolt of the American colonies elicited in France; he was aflame with the same idealistic, philosophic love of liberty which inspired a Lafayette, and for once he must have felt in

<sup>26</sup>In 1760, Voltaire wrote to the same effect to G. Keate: "... I am confident nobody in the world looks with a greater veneration [than I do] on your good philosophers, on the crowd of your good authors, and I am these thirty years the disciple of your way of thinking."—This letter, written in English, has not hitherto been included in Voltaire's *Works*; it will be found in Appendix I.



sympathy with the action of the French monarchy. The utterances of his friend Wilkes in the English Parliament further confirmed his sympathy for the Insurgents; and so we find him, some two weeks before the signing of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia, sending to Wilkes his first and only attempt in political oratory:<sup>27</sup>

“Friend Wilkes, what are you doing? If you are resting, you are much to be pitied. I have read with great satisfaction the various speeches which you have made, on the affair of the [American] provincials. I have found them full of eloquence, dignity, and strength. I have also made one, and here it is: ‘Gentlemen, I shall not speak to you upon the justice or injustice of your conduct. I am well aware that those words are but empty sounds, when the common interest is at stake. I might speak to you about your means for success, and ask you whether you are strong enough to play the part of oppressors; that might be a little nearer the question. However, I shall do nothing of the sort. But I shall be content merely to beseech you to cast a glance at the nations which hate you; ask them what they think of you, and tell me until what time you have resolved to make

<sup>27</sup> For the following unpublished letter of Diderot, see also Appendix I.

your enemies laugh.' A paper is being published here, which is said to be by a man of importance in your country; from that paper it appears that the secret plan of the mother-country is to butcher one half of the colonists, and reduce the others to the condition of the negroes. In fact, that would raise every difficulty for the present and the future."

When the success of the American Revolution was assured, Diderot, two years before his death, hailed the young republic in glowing terms, in a half-didactic, half-prophetic page, which one might consider as the message of pre-revolutionary France to the newly-born United States, and the testament of eighteenth-century philosophy to all democratic governments in the future:

"After centuries of general oppression, may the revolution which has just taken place beyond the seas, by offering to all the inhabitants of Europe a shelter against fanaticism and tyranny, instruct those who govern men on the legitimate use of their authority!


"May those brave Americans, who have preferred to see their wives outraged, their children throttled, their dwellings destroyed, their fields laid waste, their cities burned, to shed their blood and die, rather than to lose the least part of their freedom, prevent the enormous increase and unequal distribution of wealth,

luxury, idleness, the corruption of morals, and provide for the preservation of their liberty and the duration of their government! May they postpone, at least for a few centuries, the decree pronounced against all things in this world, a decree which has doomed them to have their birth, their time of vigor, their decline, and their end! May the earth swallow up that province of theirs which might one day prove powerful and insensate enough to look for the means of subjugating the others! In each of them, may the citizen either never be born, or die at once by the executioner's sword or the dagger of a Brutus, who might be powerful enough one day, and hostile enough to his own happiness, to frame the design of making himself its master!

"Let them remember that the public good is never accomplished but by necessity, and that the fatal time for governments is that of prosperity, not that of adversity.

"Let men read in the first paragraph of their annals: 'People of Northern America, remember for ever that the power from which your fathers made you free, a ruler of seas and lands but a short time before, was brought to the verge of ruin by the abuse of prosperity.'

"Adversity keeps great talents busy; prosperity makes them useless, and brings to the foremost positions the incapable, the corrupt rich, and the wicked.



"Let them bear in mind that virtue often hatches the germ of tyranny.

"If the great man is for a long time at the head of affairs, he there becomes a despot. If he is there a short time, the administration is relaxed and languishes under a succession of mediocre administrators.

"Let them bear in mind that it is neither by gold, nor even by the multitude of arms, that a State is upheld, but by morals.

"A thousand men who fear not for their lives are more to be dreaded than ten thousand who fear for their fortunes.

"Let every one of them have in his house, at the end of his field, by his loom, by his plough, his gun, his sword, and his bayonet.

"Let them all be soldiers.

"Let them bear in mind that if, in circumstances which allow of deliberation, the advice of old men is the best, in moments of crisis, youth is commonly better advised than old age"<sup>28</sup> (III, 324-325).

To sum up, Diderot's estimation of England was never founded on experience, but on second-hand information which he derived from books, and later from his conversations with English visitors in Paris and the impressions of French

<sup>28</sup> The *Essay on the reigns of Claudius and Nero*, from which this passage is extracted, was written in 1778, revised in 1782.

friends returning from London. Nevertheless, he accurately represents the attitude of the enlightened part of French opinion concerning England between 1740 and 1784. At first, he shared the unrestricted admiration of Voltaire, the Voltaire of the *Letters concerning the English nation*, for "the shelter of liberty, the land of virtue, invention, originality." Then, he grew ashamed of his infatuation, and, as social England lost its glamor in his eyes, and political England appeared tainted with corruption at home and a tyrannical selfishness abroad, he began to revise his early notions concerning that country. Finally, in the light of the world events which in 1783 culminated in England's defeat and the condemnation of a policy which had made too light of the right of men to liberty and self-government, he greeted in the American commonwealth the democracies of the future as he dreamed they should be. But to the end he discerned the true greatness of eighteenth-century England, more lasting than economic prosperity and supremacy on land and sea: he remained true to his admiration for England as a great intellectual power to which

France owed much; for English philosophy and literature; for the spirit of toleration and of free inquiry, unhampered by authority, whether spiritual or temporal, for which France was still longing. Indeed, a religious reaction had set in against freethinking in England since the advent of Methodism, about 1740; and the spirit of a Samuel Johnson, for instance, was in singular contrast with that of a David Hume: orthodoxy seemed to prevail, in public opinion, over Deism. But Diderot continued to cherish the Land of Philosophy which had given birth to Bacon, Locke, Shaftesbury, and Hume; and this sympathetic feeling was fostered in him by his intercourse with his English friends.

## CHAPTER II

### DIDEROT'S ENGLISH FRIENDS

IN a letter to Sir Horace Mann, in 1764, Horace Walpole derided the innocent mania of some French visitors who believed in *la solidité, la vertu, la profondeur anglaises*, and who had evidently been more puzzled than charmed by the "Gothick" style of his mansion at Strawberry Hill. "Is it not amazing," he went on, "that the most sensible people in France can never help being domineered by sounds and general ideas? Now everybody must be a *géomètre*, now a *philosophe*, and the moment they are either, they are to take up a character and advertise it: as if one could not study geometry for one's amusement or for its utility, but one must be a geometrician at table, or at a visit."<sup>1</sup>

One almost shudders to think of what must have happened when this fastidious *virtuoso*

<sup>1</sup> H. Walpole, *Letters*, ed. by Mrs Paget Toynbee (1903-1905), VI, 162 (December 20, 1764).

was introduced, probably in the salon of Madame du Deffand, to "notre illustre géomètre" D'Alembert, and to "le philosophe" Diderot. His aristocratic aloofness of manner and his sarcastic wit were evidently perceived by the kind-hearted, enthusiastic editor of the *Encyclopédie*, who was innocently proud of "an honorable title<sup>2</sup> which he held from a few indulgent friends, and which, when restricted to its etymology, might fit him as well as any good man" (XII, 175).

Horace Walpole, who was in Paris in 1765 and 1766, enjoys the distinction of being the only Englishman whom Diderot disliked when he met him, and for whom he had no good word to say. Let this be our reason, or rather our excuse, for disposing of him before we proceed to speak of the Englishmen who were Diderot's "friends" in a less Pickwickian sense. The supercilious humor of the dilettante of Strawberry Hill was bound to clash with the plebeian good sense and the somewhat rustic manners of "Denis le Philosophe." In Walpole's voluminous Correspondence, Diderot and D'Alembert

<sup>2</sup> The title of "Philosopher," or "friend of wisdom."



are never mentioned without a sneer and a scornful reference to their gratefulness towards Catherine II.<sup>3</sup> In the letter quoted above, Walpole refers to Richardson's novels, for which Diderot entertained an intense admiration, as "most woeful," "deplorably tedious lamentations . . . which are pictures of high life as conceived by a bookseller, and romances as they would be spiritualized by a Methodist teacher;" while elsewhere he ridicules Sterne's manner of writing, which at that time Diderot was probably engaged in imitating. Walpole had some affinities with people of the world, persons of wit and intellect, like Voltaire (though he quarrelled with him), or old Madame Du Deffand, with whom he entertained a famous friendship. But the sentimental, moralizing Diderot, whose manners were not "genteel" enough to suit even Madame Geoffrin,<sup>4</sup> Diderot with his eccentric fits of enthusiasm, his lack of humor and social refinement, must have affected him as a kind of infidel Richardson.

<sup>3</sup> H. Walpole, *Letters*, VII, 369; XI, 58, 163; XII, 39, 100.

<sup>4</sup> De Ségur, *Le royaume de la Rue Saint-Honoré*, p. 315.

As Diderot's letters after 1765 are comparatively few and cover fragmentary periods, we have no other record of the personal relations of these two men than an anecdote of a later date, to be found in Diderot's short Memoir *Sur la Princesse Dashkoff* (XVII, 491). The incident took place in 1770 at the house of the Russian princess, in Paris:

"Secretary Walpole<sup>5</sup> having very inconsiderately spoken of my country, I thought I should not suffer it; and I induced Mr Walpole to offer apologies to me, and he assured me that he had not thought that he was talking in the presence of a Frenchman. I pointed out to him that a man should not have two ways of speaking, one for the people present, and another for the absent; and I vowed that whatever I might have to say about him after he had left, I would have

<sup>5</sup>H. Walpole wrote, before going to Paris (April 9, 1764; VI, 47): "I am going to realize the very low ideas I have of modern France, by a journey to Paris." After arriving there, he complained that he was losing all his mirth (Oct. 19, 1765; VI, 332): "Laughing is as much out of fashion as *pantins* or *bilboquets*. Good folks, they have no time to laugh. There is a God and the king to be pulled down first; and men and women, one and all, are devoutly employed in the demolition. They think me quite profane, for having any belief left;" etc.—For his estimate of the *philosophers*, see his letter to Hume, Nov. 11, 1766 (VII, 70).

the courage to say to himself. Walpole went away; Princess Dashkoff praised my conduct, adding that, had she been in my place when 'the Walpole' had had the meanness to apologize because he did not think me French, she would not have answered one word, but turned her back on him with contempt; and I think she was right."

But that rather despicable parodist, who soon acquired an unenviable celebrity in Parisian society by his heartless practical joke on persecuted Rousseau,<sup>6</sup> was happily not the first nor the only Englishman of note who visited Paris at that time. The conclusion of the peace in 1763 brought about a veritable exodus of distinguished English people from England into France; it was as if the English had never so fully realised how much they needed an occasional breath of the Parisian atmosphere as during the Seven Years' War. During the lull of hostilities that had taken place between the

<sup>6</sup> It is well known that he wrote the supposed *Letter of the King of Prussia to Jean-Jacques*, which helped to further unbalance Rousseau's mind. He was rather proud of his performance (see *Letters*, VI, 396, 401, etc.), and could not understand the indignation which his meanness aroused in Madame de Boufflers, the Prince de Conti, Hume, and Turgot.

end of the War of the Austrian Succession (1748) and the beginning of the Seven Years' War (1756), Diderot had not had many chances to meet visitors from the "Philosophic Country." In 1763, however, at a time when the *Encyclopédie* was almost completed, when he was so famous throughout Europe that the empress of Russia, in order to court public opinion, was about to make him her *protégé*, he had more opportunities to see foreigners of distinction, and he was sought after by some of them. Thus it is that Diderot was already fifty years old when he began to know England through the English.

Are we to believe that Goldsmith had met him as early as 1754? It is a point of literary history which it is not very easy to clear up. Goldsmith was in Paris in that year, and attended those courses in chemistry, given by Rouelle, which have been preserved in notes taken by Diderot; he might have become acquainted with the philosopher and Rousseau in the laboratory of the famous chemist, but of this there is no evidence. He only mentions

Diderot incidentally, in a passage of his incomplete *Memoirs of M. de Voltaire* (1759):

“The person who writes this Memoir, who had the honour and the pleasure of being his (Voltaire’s) acquaintance, remembers to have seen him in a select company of wits of both sexes in Paris, when the subject happened to turn upon English taste and learning. Fontenelle, who was of the party, and who, being (was?) unacquainted with the language or authors of the country he undertook to condemn, with a spirit truly vulgar began to revile both. Diderot, who liked the English, and knew something of their literary pretensions, attempted to vindicate their poetry and learning, but with unequal abilities. The company quickly perceived that Fontenelle was superior in the dispute, and were surprised at the silence which Voltaire had preserved all the former part of the night, particularly as the conversation happened to turn upon one of his favourite topics. Fontenelle continued his triumph till about twelve o’clock, when Voltaire appeared at last roused from his reverie. His whole frame seemed animated. He began his defence with the utmost elegance mixed with spirit, and now and then let fall the finest strokes of raillery upon his antagonist; and his harangue lasted until three in the morning. I must confess, that, whether from national partiality, or from

the elegant sensibility of his manner, I never was so much charmed, nor did I ever remember so absolute a victory as he gained in this dispute.”<sup>7</sup>

This interesting anecdote, though plausible enough in some ways, unfortunately takes no account of the fact that, after his departure for Berlin in 1750, Voltaire did not return to Paris until 1778, the year of his death; in 1754, having fled from the court of the King of Prussia, he was looking for a safe refuge “in the free canton of Geneva.” On the other hand, we know that Goldsmith’s recollections are not infrequently inaccurate, especially when he wishes to provide interesting reading. He either wrongly imagined that Diderot and Fontenelle were present at a conversation which took place in Switzerland, or made a mistake in mixing Voltaire with his reminiscences of Parisian

<sup>7</sup> Goldsmith, *Miscell. Works*, Globe ed. (Prof. Masson), 1884, pp. 500–501. John Forster, *Life and Times of O. Goldsmith*, first pointed out the weak points of this story (vol. I, pp. 67–69, in 2d ed., 1854), and suggested that the meeting might have taken place at “Les Délices.” But then, as Austin Dobson remarks (*Life of Goldsmith*, 1888, p. 40), how is one to account for the presence in Switzerland of Fontenelle and Diderot, to say nothing of the “select company of wits of both sexes”?

salons. It is likely enough that, on such an occasion, Diderot may have vindicated the literature of England; but that he was so easily worsted in an argument, even by Fontenelle, is less credible. If it is to be admitted, therefore, that Goldsmith's anecdote has some foundation in fact, the natural conclusion is that Diderot himself scored the success here ascribed to Voltaire; but that Goldsmith, having had an opportunity to hear Voltaire also undertake a defence of England, when he later called on him at "Les Délices," blended the two incidents into one.

It is much to be regretted that Diderot's letters cannot give us more light than they do on his English acquaintances, both before and after 1763. His Correspondence with Mlle Volland has been transmitted to us in an incomplete state: it is said to have included 546 letters,<sup>8</sup> only 139 of which are known to us. It is not impossible that a part if not the whole of what is now missing may some day be found. But it seems probable that the lost letters have

<sup>8</sup> See *Œuv.*, XX, 103, in the notice by M. Tourneux on the lost and destroyed writings of Diderot.

been, for private reasons, destroyed, either by the Volland family before the Correspondence was returned to Diderot after Sophie's death (1774), or by Diderot himself, or by his daughter. The letters which are printed in the Assézat-Tourneux edition were written during eight months of 1759, six months of 1760, two months of 1761, four months of 1762, while there are but a few scattered letters left for the years 1765, 1766, 1767, 1768, 1769, 1772, 1773, and 1774. It will be noted that the years 1763 and 1764, which are most interesting to us as representing the period when the great exodus of the English to France took place, contributed nothing at all to that Correspondence as we know it.

From the earliest of those letters, however, those which were written in 1759 and 1760, we have seen that Diderot had just made a first-hand acquaintance with the English temperament and intellect, in the person of *le père Hoop*. The *naïve* admiration of the French philosopher, his sympathy for Hoop and his spleen, his interest in English manners and the British Parliament, all tend to prove that, to



him, Hoop was a rare and curious find. It was more than fifteen years since Diderot had risen out of obscurity; but he had been too poor, and too busy with his *Encyclopédie*, to entertain distinguished guests at his own house, or to go out and meet them in the spheres of fashionable society. It must be remembered that, like his friend Rousseau, Diderot never was at his ease in society; that he preferred philosophic discussions among men to the conversation of ladies; and that Madame d'Epinay thought it deplorable that he should be so careless of the homage which "the world" would have liked to pay to his genius. Hence the seemingly disproportionate importance of Hoop in Diderot's letters: if the melancholy Scotch surgeon was not the first Briton whom Diderot met, he at least gave Diderot his first chance thoroughly to canvass a denizen of the Land of Philosophy.

Who was Hoop, "old Hoop," *le père Hoop*? — "We call him *le père Hoop*," Diderot explains, "because he is a wrinkled, dry, oldish-looking man" (XVIII, 407). He was, to some extent, a romantic figure. Not only did he afford Diderot a rare opportunity of hearing,

from an actual sufferer, all about that incomprehensible English disorder which puzzled the gay, sociable Frenchmen of the eighteenth century, little acquainted yet with the *mal de vivre*; but, beside *la tristesse anglaise*, he had something of the *vertu* then ascribed to his nation. Born in Scotland, probably a younger son of a noble family,<sup>9</sup> he had studied medicine under

\* A learned and respected friend, Dr Edward Nicholson, the translator of Diderot's *Entretien d'un Philosophe avec la Maréchale* (*A Philosophical Conversation*, London, 1875), suggested to us that "Hoop" probably was Diderot's French way of pronouncing and spelling the name "Hope"; compare the change of "Barnwell" into "Barnevelt," because Dutch names were less strange to the French about 1750 and 1760 than English names, and the name of Van der Hoop was then more particularly familiar to all.—Now, whether "Hoop" was or was not one of the three brothers of Charles Hope, second Earl of Hopetoun (1710–1791), he certainly belonged to the firm of Hope and Co. in Amsterdam,—and this connection with the Netherlands further accounts for the "Hoop" spelling; but we have not been able to ascertain whether he was Thomas, the founder of that flourishing English concern, who died in Dec., 1779, aged 75 (see *Gentl. Mag.*, 1780, p. 50), or Adrian, or Henry.—Voltaire, in a letter to the Marquis Albergati Capacelli (*Délices*, Oct. 3, 1760), speaks of a "Mr. Hope, half-English, half-Dutch," not Diderot's "Hoop," who was then at Grandval, but probably a brother and partner: "Signor mio amabile, caro

one of the famous Gregorys; then he had gone to trade abroad. He had begun to build up a little fortune in Spain, when he heard that his eldest brother had brought shame and dishonor on the family, and driven his parents and sisters from hearth and home: Hoop came back to England, restored his people to happiness, and chastised the wicked brother. Then Hoop resumed his wanderings, for pleasure as well as for purposes of trade, going as far as China. And now, in 1759 and 1760, weary of life, longing for *l'anéantissement*, he was the guest of Baron d'Holbach at his country-seat of Grandval; in the dismal October evenings, by the fireside, or in afternoon rambles through the rain, over the hills that border the Marne, he gave Diderot the benefit of his knowledge not only of the life and institutions of England, as we have already seen, but of the Chinese and the Scottish highlanders.

The Chinese were full of absorbing interest to Holbach and Diderot, and they discussed

protettore di tutte le buone arti, vi ho scritto per mezzo d'un cavaliere chiamato M. Hope, mezzo Inglese, mezzo Olandese, e richissimo, dunque tre volte libero. Egli va a vedere tutta l'Italia e la Grecia ancora. . . ."

them with Hoop late into the night, with their candle-sticks in their hands, before retiring to bed. Hoop was fond of the Chinese. He described them as wonderfully quiet and self-possessed, very punctilious in their forms of courtesy, sly in trade, and full of strange notions concerning art (XVIII, 407, 499; XIX, 11-12).

Nations living in remote countries, Chinese, Iroquois, Tahitians, and even the Highlanders, those "savages of Europe," were interesting to eighteenth-century philosophers not merely because their religious, political, and moral notions were different from those of Europeans, but because it was assumed that, being nearer "nature," they could throw some light on the foundations of religion, politics, and ethics. This early form of anthropology used the facts derived from the experience of travelers for critical and polemical ends, adducing the example of unsophisticated savages to confirm or to undermine the philosophic ideas of more civilized nations. Thus Holbach wanted to prove man to be a naturally vicious beast, after the system of Hobbes; while Diderot, following

Shaftesbury, vindicated virtue and the natural goodness of human nature. The tales of savages related by Hoop and others served as arguments to clinch their controversy.

"Our mountaineers," said Hoop, "are naked, brave, revengeful; on occasions when they eat all together, towards the end of the meal, when their heads are heated with wine, when old quarrels begin to be revived and high words to fly, do you know how they restrain one another? They all draw their poniards, and stick them into the table, beside their glasses. That will answer the first insult" (XIX, 8). Although they know the value of gold and silver, they would not betray the Pretender when he fled to their caves for safety,—“a proof of man's natural goodness,” says Diderot in conclusion.

More terrible stories were told by General Dieskau, who some time before had returned from Canada, and was now a visitor at Grandval (Nov. 1760). Dieskau, after an uneven battle against the English and Iroquois,<sup>10</sup> had been picked up on the field horribly wounded,

<sup>10</sup> The battle around Fort Edward, on the southern end of the Lac du Saint-Sacrement, named Lake George by General Johnson.

and carried into the same tent with General Johnson: "The Englishman would never allow his own wounds to be dressed before those of his enemy had been attended to. What a moment for natural goodness and virtue to show themselves! It was in the midst of blood and carnage. . . . I could give you a hundred more examples of it." Two more are given, which had come into the conversation. "No, my dear friend, nature has not made us wicked; it is bad education, bad examples, bad legislation which corrupt us." But what of those Iroquois, Holbach would say, who wanted to massacre Dieskau in Johnson's very tent, in order to avenge the deaths of some of their chiefs? Dieskau had had a narrow escape then: carried from the camp into a city, for more safety, he was found there by the enraged Iroquois, and stabbed several times before the English could rescue him. "Ah! you will say, where is natural goodness? Who had corrupted those Indians? Who inspired them with feelings of revenge and treachery?" Diderot replies: "The gods, my friend, the gods. Revenge is a religious virtue among those savages. They believe that the

Great Spirit, who dwells behind a mountain some little way from Quebec, awaits them after death, that he will judge them, and value their merit by the number of scalps they bring" (XIX, 8).

Among the many anecdotes which Diderot heard from Hoop, a certain *histoire polissonne* is of some interest in that it bears a curious likeness to a large and rather objectionable chapter<sup>11</sup> in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. Sterne there discusses at length the invention of a Parisian apothecary for the administering of "prenatal baptism," together with the Sorbonic consultation and decision relating thereto. Ample evidence exists<sup>12</sup> that such a contrivance was suggested, and deliberated upon by the Sorbonne, in 1733; it is, like the famous formula of excommunication to which Mr Shandy resorted when Dr Slop wanted to curse Obadiah, another of Sterne's little jokes on Popery. Now,

<sup>11</sup> Chapter XX, in Prof. Saintsbury's elegant edition of Sterne.

<sup>12</sup> Sterne's reference is not fictitious: see Deventer, *Observations sur le manuel des accouchements*, Paris, 4to, 1734, p. 366; the Sorbonic deliberations took place March 30 and April 10, 1733.

Hoop tells a similar story of a Scotch doctor, one of the Gregorys, in the very year when the irreverent tale was embodied in the first volume of *Tristram*. This volume had appeared Jan. 1, 1760; Diderot tells Hoop's story Oct. 13, 1760 (XVIII, 491). Is it likely that the Scotchman fathered the grotesque invention of the Parisian apothecary on his countryman? It is difficult to believe, especially as the two operations suggested differ materially. It is more probable that those two inventive and well-meaning geniuses, Gregory and the apothecary, had quite independently hit upon the same idea.

A similar problem, or rather curiosity, of literary history will strike the student of English literature in another of the Letters to Mlle Volland (Oct. 1761; XIX, 73). Diderot writes that he has been treated to a "Roman dinner" by two young German friends, Nicolai and De La Fermière. Is there any relation between this repast, concocted according to the true precepts of Apicius, and the episode, in Smollett's *Peregrine Pickle* (Chap. 44), of the "entertainment in the manner of the Ancients"? Ten years had elapsed between the publication



When Sterne was in Paris, in the first half of 1762, he mentioned Diderot only twice: to Becket, when he ordered the books for him; and, a few days earlier, to Garrick, concerning Diderot's *Natural Son*, with little commendation of that play:

" . . . I have been these two days reading a tragedy, given me by a lady of talents to read, and conjecture if it would do for you—'Tis from the plan of Diderot, and possibly half a translation of it—The Natural Son, or the Triumph of Virtue, in five acts—It has too much sentiment in it (at least for me), the speeches too long, and savour too much of *preaching*—this may be a second reason, it is not to my taste. 'Tis all love, love, love, throughout, without much separation in the character; so I fear it would not do for your stage, and perhaps for the very reason which recommends it to a French one."<sup>16</sup>

That Diderot and Sterne were acquainted, is not improbable; that they were friends, needs to be proved. They bore some likeness to each

<sup>16</sup> April 10, 1762 (Clonmel Soc. ed., vol. III, Part I, p. 221). Sterne also asked Becket whether he would care to print that translation of Diderot's play, stating again that it would not do for the English stage. It was eventually printed by Dodsley, under the title *Dorval*, 1767.

other by their sentiment, or *sensibilité*; yet their temperaments were very different. Yorick the parson had a great deal of humor which Denis the philosopher lacked; and inversely Denis abounded in the "preaching" earnestness in which Yorick was somewhat deficient. Whether the likeness, or the contrast, bred interest in each of them for the other, remains a matter of speculation. Sterne may have looked with good-natured amusement, devoid of Walpolean contempt, on the robust sentiment of the philosopher from Langres; while Diderot was pleasantly puzzled by the strange novelties of Shandyism.

Gibbon arrived in Paris January 28, 1763, and was as warmly welcomed as Sterne had been. He had become comparatively well known in Parisian society by his *Essai sur l'étude de la littérature*, in French, published in London the preceding year, and appreciated in a flattering manner by French reviewers.<sup>17</sup> In his *Memoirs*, he expresses in a characteristic way the feelings of pride and delight which

<sup>17</sup> Gibbon, *Memoirs*, prefixed to his *Miscell. Works*, Basel, 1796, vol. I, pp. 84, 105-106, and 125-127.

were those of most English visitors to Paris when "Anglomania" reigned there:

" . . . The principal end of my journey was to enjoy the society of a polished and amiable people, in whose favor I was strongly prejudiced, and to converse with some authors, whose conversation, as I fondly imagined, must be far more pleasing and instructive than their writings. The moment was happily chosen. At the close of a successful war the British name was respected on the continent.

*Clarum et venerabile nomen  
Gentibus.*

Our opinions, our fashions, even our games, were adopted in France, a ray of national glory illuminated each individual, and every Englishman was supposed to be born a patriot and a philosopher. For myself, I carried a personal recommendation; my name and my Essay were already known; the compliment of having written in the French language entitled me to some returns of civility and gratitude. . . . Of the men of genius of the age, Montesquieu and Fontenelle were no more; Voltaire resided on his own estate near Geneva; Rousseau in the preceding year had been driven from his hermitage in Montmorency; and I blush at my having neglected to seek, in this journey, the acquaintance of Buffon. Among the men of letters

whom I saw, D'Alembert and Diderot held the foremost rank in merit, or at least in fame."

In the society of these men and of others of less importance, at the hospitable homes of Mesdames Geoffrin and Du Bocage, of Helvétius and Holbach, "fourteen weeks insensibly stole away," at the end of which Gibbon regretfully left Paris and proceeded on his way to Lausanne and Italy.

Boswell, on his return from Italy and Corsica, stayed some time in Paris in 1765 and 1766, before he escorted Thérèse Levasseur to England. With his "rage of knowing anybody that ever was talked of," and his habit of forcing himself upon people "in spite of their teeth and their doors,"<sup>18</sup> the Laird of Auchinleck should have been at least as eager as Gibbon to seek the acquaintance of Diderot, as he had sought that of Voltaire, Rousseau, and many more. Yet, as he nowhere boasts about it, we must perforce believe that he somehow failed in the attempt.

With characteristic kindness, Diderot served as a guide to many English visitors who wanted

<sup>18</sup> H. Walpole, *Letters*, V, 192.

to see Paris. He took two Englishmen one day to hear Eckard, another day to hear Mlle Bayon, two great singers. "I had two Englishmen to take about," he says simply. "They have gone back home, having seen everything; and I find that I miss them very much. They were not enthusiastic about their country. They remarked that our language had been perfected, while theirs had remained almost barbaric. 'That,' I said, 'is because no one meddles with yours, whereas we have forty geese watching over the Capitol;' a comparison which struck them as being all the more apt, because our geese, like those of Rome, watch over the Capitol but do not defend it."<sup>19</sup> Another day, he gave a warm letter of introduction to a young man

<sup>19</sup> *Salon of 1767*; XI, 374; also in the *Volland Correspondence* (XIX, 266-267), under date Aug. 24, 1768; the *Salon* was written in that year. It had early become a commonplace of English courtesy to "envy" the French their Academy. The Abbé Le Blanc, who all his life yearned in vain for a seat in that celebrated company, had enlarged upon this same topic, quoting Dryden, Locke, and Swift (*Lettres d'un Français*, Lett. 65). It seems to have remained a fashion to this day, in England, to blame the French for generally not setting enough value on a blessing for which other nations are hankering.

from Pennsylvania who would not return to America without having seen, on his way through England, "the famous Mr. Hume."<sup>20</sup>

Three great Englishmen who were in Paris after 1763 deserve special mention, because their relations with Diderot were not of a conjectural nature, but were characterized by true friendliness: Garrick, Hume, and Wilkes associated with him in Paris, and corresponded with him after they had returned to England. Of this correspondence little is as yet known; but it may be surmised that, if the bulk of Diderot's Correspondence as we have it is to receive substantial additions in the future, a number of such additions will probably come from the papers of those and other English contemporaries.<sup>21</sup>

It is, for instance, a matter of surprise that there should be but one letter extant from Diderot to David Garrick. That their relations were most friendly may safely be assumed, not

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix I, p. 470.

<sup>21</sup> Some curious letters of Diderot to Hume, not collected in the Assézat-Tourneux edition, and some unpublished letters to Wilkes, will be found at the end of this book, Appendix I.

so much on the strength of Diderot's philosophic familiarity with his "dear Roscius" in that single letter—for with whom could not Diderot be familiar?—as because there is abundant evidence that the English actor was greatly admired by Diderot and his circle in Paris, when he favored them with exhibitions of his histrionic talent, and that he exerted a rather important influence on the esthetic creed of Diderot. According to Garrick's latest biographer,<sup>22</sup> in a work most interesting to us in that it deals especially with that actor's French friends, it was probably not in Garrick's first journey to Paris, in 1751, but in his tour to France and Italy in 1763 and 1764, that he became acquainted with Diderot. The philosopher, who in his youth had yearned for the glory of the stage, and in whose general plan of dramatic

<sup>22</sup> F. A. Hedgecock, *D. Garrick et ses amis français*, Paris, 1911, p. 66. We shall further develop, in our Chapters VI and VIII, the importance of Garrick's influence on Diderot's critical ideas. Mr Hedgecock graphically depicts (from Garrick's *Memoirs*, p. 205) warm discussions between Garrick, Diderot, and Marmontel, at the house of Baron d'Holbach, with the Abbé Morellet watching the scene. On the discrepancy, amounting to a contradiction, between Diderot's ideas on acting in 1758 and in 1770, see Mr Hedgecock's book, pp. 173-174.

reforms there was so much of criticism and advice concerning the actor's art, seems to have learned a great deal from the famous Garrick, or at least to have found, in his discussions with him, opportunities to revise his own theories and adjust his points of view. Before meeting Garrick, Diderot had freely asserted, and often endeavored to prove, that genius is essentially enthusiastic, unconscious of itself, as spontaneous and instinctive as nature itself; after he had known him, he brilliantly defended an exactly opposite theory, and defined artistic genius as being, above all, self-possessed, conscious of all its means, and very careful not to allow any admixture or interference of real with fictitious emotions. The occasion to develop in writing this famous "paradox" came for him in 1770, when he reviewed a pamphlet by an obscure actor, Antonio Sticoti, entitled *Garrick or the English Actors*.

Garrick, on his return from Italy through Paris in 1765, played the dagger scene from *Macbeth* before some friends, again eliciting enthusiastic admiration, of which we find an echo in Grimm and Diderot's *Correspondance*



*littéraire* (July, 1765). His bust by Le Moyne was exhibited in the Salon of 1765, and discussed by Diderot (X, 425). Walpole, in a letter dated March 26, 1765, could not help noticing Garrick's great popularity in Paris. And we have seen that, when Holbach visited London in the same year, he called on the great actor, and was shown the monument which he had erected to Shakespeare. Twelve years later Gibbon found as warm a memory of Garrick in Parisian circles as if the latter had but just returned to England.

Hume, as well as Garrick, had made a journey to France at a comparatively early stage of his life, and sojourned there from 1734 until 1737: it was then that he wrote, mostly at La Flèche, his *Treatise on Human Nature*, which he published in 1739. That work, on which he had founded great expectations, "fell dead-born from the press;" and, although it is to-day for us his most lasting title to glory, it does not seem to have been appreciated in accordance with its true value in his lifetime. In 1763, he came to Paris as Secretary of Embassy, under Lord Hertford. Diderot knew him

already as the author of *Essays, Moral and Political* (1741–1742), and the *Inquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748): the French translation of the *Inquiry* (1751) by Mlle de la Chaux, had been revised by Diderot.<sup>23</sup> He also admired Hume as a bold political thinker, and the stern historian of the Stuarts. A feeling of genuine friendship sprang up between the two philosophers: shortly after arriving in Paris, Hume wrote to his Scottish friend Dr Blair that Diderot, D'Alembert, Buffon, Marmontel, Duclos, Helvétius, and the President Hénault were the men whom he liked best.<sup>24</sup> He further said: "There is not one deist among them." Indeed most of them were far beyond that intermediate stage of infidelity, as he very soon discovered. In a letter to Mlle Volland (XIX, 185), Diderot relates how Hume was undeceived; and he later repeated the anecdote to Sir Samuel Romilly. Hume,

<sup>23</sup> The *Inquiry*, in the first two editions, had been entitled *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding*.—See W. Knight, *Hume*, 1886, p. 50. As early as 1759 and 1760, Hume's philosophical and historical works had been translated into French.

<sup>24</sup> J. H. Burton, *Life and Corresp. of D. Hume*, 1846, vol. II, pp. 180–181.

discussing the topic of natural religion at one of Holbach's dinners, declared that he did not believe in the existence of atheists, because he had never seen any: "You are unfortunate," replied his host, "for here you are dining with seventeen of them for the first time."<sup>25</sup> The change of atmosphere from Edinburgh to Paris was of course in all respects very great. But Hume was not the man to suffer from it: delighted with his new surroundings, popular in town with the ladies, he was even courted at Versailles, where he found the Dauphin engaged in reading one of his works (XIX, 209), and was treated by three little princes of the blood of France—the future Louis XVI, Louis XVIII, and Charles X—with compliments memorized for the purpose.<sup>26</sup> Diderot seems above all to have esteemed him for his benevolent aspect, his true good-nature, and his "fat Bernardine cheeks." After Hume's return to England, the French philosopher wrote letters to him, and it is interesting to note that they

<sup>25</sup> *Memoirs of Romilly*, 2d ed., 1840, vol. I, p. 179 (Nov. 16, 1781).

<sup>26</sup> On Hume's popularity in Paris, see W. Knight, *Hume*, Chap. VII.

were always letters of recommendation, sometimes to introduce a friend of Madame Diderot's who had resolved to try and make a living in England, or simply to oblige an obscure young Pennsylvanian.

The consideration shown Hume by the French court was also extended, in a lesser degree, to another Englishman visiting France, in 1763 and 1764, somewhat against his will and in an altogether unofficial capacity. John Wilkes, on arriving in Paris (Dec. 29, 1763), called on the English ambassador, and left his card with Hume, whom he shortly after met again at the house of Baron d'Holbach. When Wilkes was declared an outlaw in England (Nov., 1764), the ambassador ceased to invite him to his receptions; but the French court and French society showed themselves quite as hospitable as before, and even more so—a just retaliation for the excellent treatment accorded the persecuted *Helvétius* in London in that same year! Diderot tells us of a most romantic love affair which the English patriot had in Naples in 1765, and which may be to his credit or not,

as one chooses to regard it.<sup>27</sup> When Wilkes was returned at the polls for Middlesex (March 28, 1768), Diderot warmly congratulated him.<sup>28</sup> In another letter to his "dear Gracchus," he depicted France in 1771 as being on the verge of a revolution; and we have seen, in the preceding chapter, with what glowing enthusiasm he greeted Wilkes's speeches a few years later in favor of the American colonists.

In writing to Wilkes in 1771, Diderot took the liberty to recommend to him a certain Mlle Biheron, who excelled in making anatomical models and in teaching anatomy, and who was going to England. This lady knew Franklin, and occasionally carried letters for him to England, evidently without the knowledge of Diderot. He was keenly interested in the great American, but it does not appear that he was ever

<sup>27</sup> In a letter to Mlle Volland, XIX, 202. Contemporary letters from Winckelmann and Boswell to Wilkes, preserved in the Wilkes Collection of MSS at the British Museum, evince a great deal of interest in that affair with "la Corradini"; but Wilkes seemed rather inclined to drop the subject.

<sup>28</sup> This letter (April 2, 1768), republished in XIX, 490, from the English translation given in *The Correspondence of the late John Wilkes with his friends* (1805), is not known in the French original.

able to gain access to him. He admired him as scientist, free-thinker, patriot, and the servant of a great cause. As early as 1754, in his *Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature*, he had referred to Franklin's *Experiments and Observations on Electricity*, translated in 1752 by the Abbé d'Alibard, as a model of scientific investigation. He later read some of Franklin's political writings, published in French by Barbeau du Bourg together with Dickinson's *Letters of a Pennsylvania Farmer* (IV, 86). But, when Franklin came to Paris as an agent of the American colonies, he associated more with the Economists than with the Philosophers. Diderot, in a little dramatic sketch entitled *Est-il bon? Est-il méchant?* outlined by him in 1770 and developed in 1781, represents himself as curiously inquiring from an official of the French government after the American patriot; and he is then informed that Franklin is indeed "a sharp Quaker," *un acuto Quakero*,—a characterization which he evidently owed to his connection with the city of Philadelphia.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Concerning Mlle Bihéron, whom Diderot also recommended in 1774 to Catherine II (*Œuv.*, XX, 62), see M. M. Tourneux's work on *Diderot et Catherine II*, pp.

It must have been shortly after his return from Petersburg and the court of "the Northern Semiramis" that Diderot met Burke, probably at the house of Mlle de Lespinasse.<sup>30</sup> Burke, according to the testimony of Mme du Deffand, spoke French very imperfectly, and on the other hand Diderot does not seem to have been able to speak English as easily as he read it; so that it is not likely that they became very intimately acquainted. Sympathy would have been lacking for the formation of ties of friendship between these two men. Diderot could not think much of a man who had come to France in order to entrust the supervision of his son's education to a French bishop, who was thrown into raptures by his visit to the court of Versailles, and who is known to have brought back from the Parisian philosophic salons a passionate hatred of all free-thinkers.<sup>31</sup>

387 ff.; and on her connection with Franklin, see *Franklin in France*, by Edw. E. Hale and Edw. E. Hale Jr, Boston, 1888, 2 vols. (vol. I, pp. 17, 73). Diderot had studied anatomy with Mlle Biheron, who for some time had been his neighbor on the Place de l'Estrapade (IX, 240, n.).

<sup>30</sup> J. Morley, *Burke*, 1879, p. 66. Little is known about Burke's residence in Paris.

<sup>31</sup> In a letter from Horace Walpole to the Countess of

The French disciples of English thinkers had indeed gone far beyond their masters in boldness of speculation; so that the truly representative Englishmen who chanced to visit Paris in the twenty years which preceded the French Revolution stood aghast at a freedom of thought and speech which was no longer, if it ever had truly been, fashionable or "proper" in Great Britain. The characteristic fondness of the English for order, for compromise, and for Upper Ossory (March 11, 1773, Toynbee ed., vol. VIII, 252), we read that "Mr Burke is returned from Paris, where he was so much the mode that, happening to dispute with the philosophers, it grew the fashion to be Christians. St. Patrick himself did not make more converts."

Lord Morley aptly quotes (*Burke*, p. 69) a passage from Burke's *Speech on the Relief of Protestant Dissenters* (1773), from which one might think that, had Burke been born a French subject, he could have found it in him to endorse the persecuting policy of the French monarchy: "These [the free-thinkers] are the people against whom you ought to aim the shaft of the law; these are the men to whom, *arrayed in all the terrors of government*, I would say, 'You shall not degrade us into brutes.' . . . The most horrid and cruel blow that can be offered to civil society is through atheism. . . . The infidels are outlaws of the constitution, not of this country, but of the human race. They are never, never to be supported, *never to be tolerated.*"



every kind of half-way measures in vital matters, that particular form of practical sense which renders men unwilling rather than unfit frankly to deal with great questions of metaphysics and religion as well as politics, must have revolted against the intellectual radicalism and the relentlessly analytic bent of French thinkers. Dr Johnson in his short trip to Paris in 1775 found time to call on Fréron and to make friends with Benedictine monks,<sup>32</sup> but steered clear of those haunts of infidelity which had so warmly welcomed a Hume and a Wilkes.

Diderot, three years before his death, had a conversation with Sir Samuel Romilly which may serve to illustrate this point of the divorce between the fundamental tendencies of the French and the English intellects at this time. "He praised the English," says Romilly, "for having led the way to true philosophy, but the adventurous genius of the French, he said, had pushed them on before their guides. 'Vous autres,' these were his words, 'vous mêlez la théologie avec la philosophie; c'est gâter tout,

<sup>32</sup>Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (Birkbeck Hill), vol. II, p. 441 ff.

c'est mêler le mensonge avec la vérité; il faut *sabrer* la théologie.' . . . 'Vous Anglais vous croyez *un peu* en Dieu; pour nous autres nous n'y croyons guère.'"<sup>33</sup> As Romilly's correspondent showed some curiosity concerning the famous French philosopher, and further inquired of Romilly what he thought of him, our traveler remained on the safe ground of generalities: he was "not vain enough to pronounce what was the extent of Diderot's and D'Alembert's learning and capacity," but he expatiated on the pity and horror deserved by such as labor under the "deadly contagious disease" of atheism, and, being inclined to think that they should not be spared, he took pleasure in quoting Plato against "unbounded toleration." Yet he was glad and not a little proud to have seen those famous men, "D'Alembert and Diderot, the most celebrated of all the writers then remaining in France." Romilly goes on:

"D'Alembert was in a very infirm state of health, and not disposed to enter much into conversation with a person so shy and so unused to society as I was. Diderot, on the contrary, was

<sup>33</sup> Sir Samuel Romilly, *Memoirs*, 2d edit., 1840, vol. I, p. 179.

all warmth and eagerness, and talked to me with as little reserve as if I had been long and intimately acquainted with him. Rousseau, politics, and religion, were the principal topics of his conversation. The *Confessions* of Rousseau were, at that time, expected shortly to appear; and it was manifest, from the bitterness with which Diderot spoke of that work and of its author, that he dreaded its appearance. On the subject of religion he made no disguise; or rather he was ostentatious of a total disbelief in the existence of a God. He talked very eagerly upon politics, and inveighed with great warmth against the tyranny of the French government. He told me that he had long meditated a work upon the death of Charles the First; that he had studied the trial of that prince; and that his intention was to have tried him over again, and to have sent him to the scaffold if he had found him guilty, but that he had at last relinquished the design. In England he would have executed it, but he had not the courage to do so in France."<sup>34</sup>

\* Romilly, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-64. Sir Samuel in Paris had associated a great deal with the Genevese watchmaker Romilly,—a man not in any way related to him; this Swiss Romilly, a former contributor to the *Encyclopédie*, introduced the Englishman to D'Alembert and Diderot, and made him side with Rousseau in the controversy here alluded to, which gave rise to so many digressions in Diderot's *Essay on the reigns of Claudius and Nero*, revised about this time.

It must have been very puzzling indeed for a French philosopher, after 1760, to find contemporary England so different from what he had imagined. The contrast was particularly striking and painful to a man who, like Diderot, had read a great deal about England, and seen nothing of the country itself. Viewed through the works of Hobbes, Locke, Shaftesbury, Bolingbroke, the Deistic writers and Hume, and through the impressions of Muralt, Voltaire, and the Abbé Le Blanc, England appeared as being preëminently a revolutionary land, not at all averse to any kind of novelty in religion, politics, science, and literature. But when the Englishmen who came to Paris were questioned, when they took part in philosophic discussions, behold, quite another spirit was revealed: the Walpoles, the Burkes, the Romillys, nay, even the Humes, seemed unwilling to follow out their thinking to its legitimate conclusions; they were inspired with decidedly conservative tendencies, and were far indeed from the Tolands, the Tindals, the Collinses, whose bold attacks on Christianity were being translated and republished by Diderot's friends, Naigeon

and the Baron d'Holbach. The very names of the early Deists were loathed in England. Hume, whose rather independent manner of thinking on religious subjects had procured for him a bad reputation in his native country, had for a time been infatuated with the enemy of the Encyclopedists, Rousseau; and Rousseau himself found in England a wider sympathy (mingled of course with much orthodox blame) than any member of the Philosophic party, who had thought to be in the true English tradition.

The fact is, that while French thinkers had enthusiastically welcomed the bolder results of English Rationalism, and nursed and fostered in French soil all the seeds of intellectual emancipation and positive thought that they had found in English works produced under the reigns of William III and Queen Anne, England under the first Georges had seen the Deists routed in controversy; a revival of the religious spirit had been brought about by Methodism; political agitation had settled down into an apparently satisfactory system of parliamentary government. The two nations were drifting

farther and farther apart in spirit; and the last representatives of French Philosophy tried to find the true English spirit, the real tradition of English thought, in the last of the Deists, Gibbon, Wilkes, and Hume.

## CHAPTER III

### THE MORALIST AND PHILOSOPHER

IF, of all French writers in the eighteenth century, Diderot is more generally known to-day under the title of "philosopher," if in his own lifetime he was commonly thus designated not only by "a few indulgent friends," but by France and Europe, it should be clearly understood that he did not owe that name to any special achievement in the field of metaphysics, to any system of thought which he could call his own. He holds no place in the history of philosophy properly so-called: in the evolution of rationalistic thought between Descartes and Kant, Hume's phenomenism and the materialism of Holbach and Helvétius are of much more account than Diderot's occasional excursions in the realm of metaphysics. He was, however, a philosopher in the more esoteric, broad, inaccurate sense which that word has to-day in unphilosophic spheres, and commonly had in eighteenth-century society. To the larger part of every age and nation, since Socrates, ethical speculation divested of religious

aspects has appeared to be the proper region of philosophy. Now, Diderot not only lived the simple life, looked "like an ancient orator," fought the battles of Rationalism against political and ecclesiastical abuses, evinced a universal interest in the sciences and arts, and was truly an "encyclopedic" genius, or (as Voltaire used to call him) a *Pantophile*; but he was, first and above all, a moralist.

In 1745, when he had yet given nothing to the press except a translation of a Greek History and of a Medical Dictionary, from the English, Diderot made his first attempt at authorship, or rather semi-authorship, by publishing his paraphrase of the *Inquiry concerning Virtue or Merit*, which had appeared<sup>1</sup> in 1711, as a part of the *Characteristics* of Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury.

Shaftesbury's moral treatise was about that time extremely popular, both in England and France, for different reasons. To Shaftesbury's English disciples, to Bolingbroke, Hutcheson, Pope, and Hume, the *Inquiry* appeared essen-

<sup>1</sup> First published by Toland in 1699, without the author's permission.



tially as a victorious vindication of disinterested moral affections against Hobbes's reduction of all affections to those of the selfish kind. By French thinkers, the same work was considered as the first clear statement of "natural ethics" founded on "natural religion," that is, an ethical system with an independent, secular, non-revealed foundation, an application of Rationalism to the problems of conduct quite as rigorous and successful, yet less abstruse, than the *Ethics* of Spinoza, from which it was derived.

The opening pages of the *Inquiry* may well have attracted the attention of Diderot, as of any contemporary inclined to free-thinking. Shaftesbury begins by contending, against a prevailing belief, that religion and virtue, although nearly related in many respects, are not inseparable companions. (Diderot, being immediately reminded of his brother, who had more of religion than of natural goodness, dedicated his paraphrase to him.) Are we not always more concerned about the honesty than about the religion of any man with whom we have some important transaction? It follows

that virtue, or goodness, can be defined in itself, apart from any religious creed; and that the influence of each creed on natural morality should be properly investigated.

Now, the main opinions relating to the Deity can be classified as follows:—*Theism*, according to which the universe is ruled for the best by a ruling mind;—*Atheism*, according to which the universe is ruled by chance;—*Polytheism*, according to which the universe is ruled by two or more minds, good in their nature;—*Dæmonism*, according to which the universe is ruled by one or several minds, not absolutely good, but capable of following their mere will and fancy. —Lastly, various combinations of these main beliefs are possible, and have been or are existent.<sup>2</sup>

Shaftesbury then proceeds to define goodness or virtue. He does not think it to be conceivable, or to have any meaning, in some individual imagined solitary, some hypothetic Crusoe of creation, living outside of any system or society

<sup>2</sup> See the Introduction to J. M. Robertson's edition of the *Characteristics*, Lond., 1900, 2 vols.—Also Thomas Fowler, *Shaftesbury and Hutcheson* (English Philosophers Series), 1883.

of beings. Virtue therefore is essentially a *social fact*. Self-interest and selfish passions, good in themselves, are vicious only when opposed to the general good. Since everything is a part of some system or systems in the great whole, it follows that nothing is absolutely good or evil in nature. It follows also that no religious faith or philosophic doctrine is bad in itself, but that all are to be judged according to the measure in which they increase or weaken the principles of right social action or morality. —Now, none of the doctrines enumerated above can deprive men of their natural feeling concerning right and wrong. This feeling, in spite of Locke's opinion against innateness, is described by Shaftesbury as *innate*, thereby resembling the esthetic feeling, which Shaftesbury also takes to be born with man. But, if the moral feeling cannot be done away with by those systems of belief, it may be altered or obscured by them; and in this respect atheism is less to be feared than superstition, which has always proved fertile in persecutions. Lastly, the passions may be used for or against natural virtue by the different systems concerning the Deity: the hope of

rewards and the fear of punishment hereafter are strong incentives which are lacking in atheism; but theism does not look upon the affections of fear and hope as very commendable motives, because they detract from the merit of virtuous living. The contemplation of the order of the universe, the belief that everything is for the best, a strong persuasion that personal interest is inseparable from the social interest, are for Shaftesbury the best foundations of virtue.

Thus theism, optimism, utilitarianism, constitute the sum of this ethical system. Widely tolerant of all religious and metaphysical beliefs, condemning none absolutely, but pointing out the advantages and defects of each of them for moral action, placing morality outside of them and above them, and defining virtue as an intelligent pursuit of happiness through social benevolence and a wise management of the individual affections, such a system could not fail to attract a great deal of interest in an age when men had grown tired of religious strifes, and were looking for a positive foundation of morality. The apparent logic of the doctrine, its

clear presentation, and the further developments which it received in the other essays and reflections subjoined to the *Inquiry* in the publication of the *Characteristics*, possibly also that very tone of urbanity which Charles Lamb later on ridiculed (not very justly) by calling it "genteel," made Shaftesbury's moral system extremely popular among men intent on popularizing philosophy. Bolingbroke and Pope developed it in prose and verse, and through them it reached Voltaire and arrested his attention. Montesquieu, in his *Pensées Diverses*, declared: "The four great poets are Plato, Malebranche, Shaftesbury, Montaigne,"<sup>3</sup>—possibly meaning, to use a modern phrase, the four great creators of new *moral values*. In Germany, Shaftesbury's system practically replaced the similar doctrine expounded by Leibnitz in his *Théodicée* (1710), and affected the ethics and esthetics of Kant. In England, through Hutcheson, Hume, Bentham, Stuart Mill, and Herbert Spencer, rational ethics became as it were ingrained in English philosophy.

As for Diderot, what impelled him to trans-

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in J. M. Robertson, *Introd.*, p. ix.

late or adapt Shaftesbury's *Inquiry*? And with what reserves or alterations did he effect that adaptation?

To a young man with a philosophic turn of mind, anxious to probe the best solutions given to the problem of human conduct, there was in France, about 1745, little else to choose between but the various kinds of "heathen virtue," on the one hand, and Christianity in a more or less Jansenistic garb, on the other. Ancient Pyrrhonism had been revived by Montaigne. Descartes had been content with a *morale provisoire*, inspired from Stoicism, which had never been followed up by the systematic ethical doctrine of which it bore the promise. La Rochefoucauld, in spite of his intellectual likeness to Hobbes, and La Bruyère, could not be considered as moralists in the philosophic sense of the word, being descriptive rather than dogmatic moralists. Pascal's profound defence of Christianity as conceived by the disciples of Jansenius was still greatly influential in the French middle-class, particularly in the judiciary; but no doctrine could be more opposed to the rationalistic tendencies of the age, and, while it was

discredited by the superstitious demonstrations of the populace in its favor, ridiculed by public opinion, persecuted by the Jesuits and the government, it had been controverted in the name of reason by Voltaire, in his *Remarks on Pascal's 'Thoughts,'* a supplement to his *Lettres philosophiques* (1734).

Diderot found in Shaftesbury what his abundant reading of Montaigne, Cicero, and Seneca had not given him: a complete system of ethics founded on reason and psychological experience, equally distant from the unsafe regions of mystic perfection and the severe heights of stoic virtue, yet apparently as consistent and satisfactory.

"We are not lacking in moral treatises," he wrote in his *Discours préliminaire* (I, 11-12); "but no one yet has thought of giving us the elements of ethics. . . . The science of morals formed the main part of philosophy among the Ancients, who in this, I think, were much wiser than we are. From the way in which we treat that science, one might think either that it is less essential now for a man to know his duty, or that it is easier to fulfill it. A young man, on completing his course in philosophy, is thrown into a world of atheists, deists, Socinians,

Spinozists, and other infidels; knowing much about the properties of the 'subtile matter' and the formation of 'vortices,' a marvellous science which becomes perfectly useless to him; but hardly aware of the advantages of virtue except through what a tutor has told him, or of the foundations of his religion except through what he has read in his catechism. We must hope that those enlightened professors who have purged logic of the 'universals' and 'categories,' metaphysics of the 'entities' and 'quiddities,' and in physics substituted experiments and geometry for frivolous hypotheses, will be struck with this defect, and will not refuse to give ethics some of those patient labors which they devote to the public good. I shall be happy if this Essay finds a place in the multitude of materials which they will gather together."

Diderot clearly perceived that a reform of ethical thought was a natural consequence of the new scientific spirit which had accomplished so much, since the time when Bacon and Descartes had resolutely forsaken Scholastic philosophy. But, however sincerely he may have thought that his presentation of Shaftesbury's system filled a great want in his country, there were two powers which, even with the best intentions, the philosopher could not neglect to



consider while introducing the new ethics: those were, to use Shaftesbury's words, "that abominable blasphemous representation of church power" and that "worst of temporal governments" which ruled the land.<sup>4</sup> In these two directions, Diderot could not be too cautious in his adaptation of intellectual novelties from England. He therefore carefully states, in his Preliminary Discourse, that the virtue he is about to discuss is only "moral virtue, that virtue which even the Fathers of the Church have granted to some heathen philosophers." He then proceeds to clear theism and "My lord S \* \* \*" of all suspicions of impiety, and to distinguish<sup>5</sup> the *deist*, "who believes in God but denies any revelation," from the *theist*, "who is near admitting revelation and already admits a God" (I, 13). Shaftesbury, he says, has very unjustly been ranked with the Asgils, Tindals, and Tolands, "bad Protestants and bad writers," whom Swift had so pleasantly derided in his *Argument concerning the Abolishing of Christianity in England*. The *Inquiry*

<sup>4</sup> Shaftesbury, *Letters to a Young Man at the University*, Letter I.

<sup>5</sup> Comp. Shaftesbury's *Moralists*, in *Charact.* (ed. cit.), vol. II, 19.

is not directed against religion; what will be gained for the "God of nations" and for natural religion will also be gained for the better knowledge of the God of Christians.

After these rhetorical precautions, which in our freer times it is more easy than fair to condemn, Diderot explains how he has written his paraphrase: "I have read over and over again Mylord S \* \* \* , filled myself with his spirit, then closed his book, as it were, when I took up my pen." This is not literally true.<sup>6</sup> Diderot's work is practically a translation, which was certainly not written with the English original closed; only, as he more truly proceeds to state, he has condensed what was lengthy, developed what appeared too concise, corrected what was but too boldly thought. A comparison of the two works fully proves that Diderot made a translation, but a free translation.

For instance, here are specimens of English "boldness" as corrected by the French writer.<sup>7</sup>

\* Critics generally have taken Diderot's words too much on trust in this matter (T. Fowler, *Shaftesbury*, p. 160; etc.).

<sup>7</sup> In what follows, I quote from J. M. Robertson's edition of the *Characteristics*, vol. I, and Diderot, *Œuv.*, vol. I.

"Religion only excludes perfect atheism" (Shaft., p. 241) becomes: "Atheism alone excludes all religion" (Did., p. 22).—Elsewhere (Shaft., p. 285), when too much seems to be said about the determining power of mere affections in "animals," Diderot (p. 70) points out that only animals are meant, not human beings.—Or again, when the heroism of men who died to rid the world of tyrants is dwelt on (Shaft., p. 290), Diderot reminds us that this should be understood as referring to examples from ancient history only, and that of course the inviolability of kings is not in question (p. 74).—Again, when the English author commits himself to the statement that "the economy of the social affections makes temporal happiness," Diderot takes good care (p. 77) to add a long paragraph reserving the higher rights of the contemplative life. It was an easy thing, and even patriotic in a way, for the protestant Briton to inveigh against "absolute monarchs" and "pampered priests," not only of the past, but of his own time (Shaft., pp. 313, 316); while it is somewhat pathetic to see the French philosopher draw on the Orient or antiquity for adequate

terms: "those opulent communities of idle dervishes" (Did., p. 97), "those sombre Oriental monarchs, those proud sultans," not ruled by love for their people, "but by a weakness for some vile creature," etc. (p. 100); and all allusions to a similar state of affairs in the present are eschewed. Even such veils thrown on a writer's meaning had become very transparent since Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*; but they were sufficient to save the situation, and keep the police away from the philosopher's door.

It would be less interesting to give examples of the manner in which Diderot unravels his author's elaborate periods, cutting them up in short sentences, suppressing redundancies and tiresome ornaments, enlivening the style with questions, apostrophes, dialogues, and occasional developments of his own. The numerous footnotes are but the overflow, as it were, of what he could not insert in the close woof of the argument. They generally tend, as well as the additions in the text, to emphasize the condemnation of atheism on the one hand, and of the persecuting spirit of bigotry on the other, to apologize for the much maligned influence of

passions on human actions, and to tone down whatever might give offense to orthodoxy.

The influence of Shaftesbury on Diderot's ethical speculations seems to have been lasting. Both considered the science of morals as much more important than metaphysics, right action and happiness as preferable to plausible intellectual speculation (Shaft., I, 189, 197; II, 276;—Did., II, 257); both agreed in condemning "enthusiasm" in its early meaning of religious fanaticism, and in praising it in its modern sense of a noble passion for action; both were "intoxicated with the idea of Virtue,"<sup>8</sup> and not only professed a secular kind of righteousness with great constancy, to the annoyance of ill-tempered critics, but were very really benevolent, and made their lives good illustrations of their precepts; lastly, both shared to an uncommon degree the traditional philosophic dislike for "all the anointed of the Lord, under any title whatsoever" (Did., II, 289), and spared them only as much as was consistent with prudence.

Yet Diderot was different from his English

<sup>8</sup> T. Fowler, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-37.

master in two respects: his heart was apt to grow more enthusiastic in the defence of virtue, while his mind, being more critical than that of Shaftesbury, better perceived the shortcomings of the cause which they had both undertaken to defend. Hence, although he took up the doctrine of virtue as a necessary social fact with great fervor, and remained a good utilitarian always, he soon abandoned his weak plea for theism as a religion, and never was tempted to make optimism the foundation of his philosophy of life. He confesses somewhere (II, 345) that he had always thought it better to be a good man, *un homme de bien*, without ever being able to demonstrate the reason why. For, after all, if morality is not a social imposition, as Hobbes and his school would have it, if we cannot conceive of it as being merely the unexplained will of God, as Locke chose to consider it, if it is truly founded on "the public good," as is taught by Shaftesbury, the question arises: "Where lies the public good?" Who shall decide wherein it consists, the fanatic or the philosopher (XI, 121)? Socrates or his judges? The law and the Church of the kingdom of France, or Diderot?

Concerning this problem of the foundations of social ethics, Diderot seems to have resolved his doubt in two different manners. Scientifically, he gradually came to ascribe the origin of morality to the nature of man and the development of human societies, that is, he gave it a physical basis in a common organization and common needs: such a system of universal morality founded on nature is to be found in outline in an eloquent page of the *Fragments from a Philosopher's Portfolio* (1772). In this solution, he abandoned Shaftesbury's inneistic conception of the moral and the esthetic notions, and explained them by the experience of the individual living in society. Speculatively, he dreamt of perfect happiness in a very ideal state of society, not so much that blissful condition of innocent savages which he praised in his *Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage*, but a sort of Utopia in which both virtue and society would have so far harmonized as to become needless. In his old age, he wrote one day, referring to his early interest in Shaftesbury's *Inquiry*:

"I was very young when it came into my head that the whole of ethics consisted in prov-

ing to men that, after all, in order to be happy, there was nothing better in this world to do than to be virtuous; I at once began to meditate on that question, and am still meditating it.

"Shall I tell you a fine paradox? Well, I am convinced that there cannot be any real happiness for mankind except in a social state in which there would be no king, no magistrate, no priest, no laws, no thine or mine, no ownership of property, no vices or virtues; and that social state is the dickens of an ideal! That does not very well agree with the economic shop, does it?" (VI, 439).

It certainly did not. But such a "fine paradox," in the eighteenth century, could not be taken seriously, so harmless did it appear in its very enormity. After all, it was but a reminiscence of Montaigne,<sup>9</sup> who was a great favorite of Diderot, as of many other *honnêtes gens*. Diderot courted greater danger indeed, when in 1747 he published his *Pensées philosophiques*: they were sentenced by the Parliament of Paris, on July 7 of the same year, to be publicly burnt, as Voltaire's *Lettres philosophiques* had been thirteen years before.

<sup>9</sup> *Essays*, chapter on Cannibals, imitated by Shakespeare in *Tempest*, Act II, sc. 1.



The *Philosophic Thoughts* of Diderot are said to have been written between Good Friday and Easter of 1747 (I, xlii). Such expedition should not be wondered at, when one considers that the dangerous volume in which Diderot, discarding circumlocution, openly defended deism and natural religion, was little else than a compilation of passages from Shaftesbury and a few others. This fact has not, to our knowledge, been pointed out before. Diderot sent to the press a collection of philosophic fragments, extracts, or "discoveries," out of his scrap-book. Probably encouraged by the way in which his paraphrase of the *Inquiry* had been received, he wished to try how the "bold thoughts" of the English moralist would fare in his age and country. The outcome must have answered his expectations: the *Thoughts*, persecuted by the judicial powers, were widely read by the public, anonymously reprinted by various publishers, and abundantly refuted.

The main ideas in this book are to be found scattered throughout the *Characteristics*. Passions are rehabilitated against the sweeping denunciations of theologians and moralists of the

- ✓ older schools (*Thoughts*, I–V). The evils caused by religious zeal, asceticism, superstition, are contrasted with the comparative harmlessness of
- ✓ atheism (*Th.*, VI–XII). Atheism in turn is represented as more effectively confuted by deists—and by scientists, adds Diderot—than by the efforts of orthodoxy (*Th.*, XIII–XIX):
- ✓ God is proved by the very existence of mind, and by the harmony of nature (XX). Besides, deism, while less abhorrent to unbelievers than dogmatic theology, and more readily embraced by them, has decided advantages over atheism and scepticism in ethics (*Th.*, XXIII). Scep-
- ✓ ticism is in a way necessary to attain belief, as long as it does not stop half-way, and rest content with itself (*Th.*, XXVIII–XXXVI). Negative atheism is to be pitied, doubting atheism can be brought over to belief (XXII). Miracles have ceased; only fanatics and enthusiasts are ready to believe in them at any time (*Th.*, XLI–XLII, and XLVI). New religions
- ✓ are dangerous to a State, and to civilization itself, as was exemplified even by Christianity in its beginnings (*Th.*, XLIII–XLIV).<sup>10</sup> Con-

<sup>10</sup> The great similarity between the *Thoughts* of Diderot and some *Essays* of Hume (1741–1742) on miracles and

clusive evidence of the divine character of Scripture should not be derived from its literary worth, but from history and exegesis (XLV, LX). Both authors profess that they hold the faith of their national Church as well as any of the bigoted class who will attack them (LVIII).

Some other suggestions in the *Philosophic Thoughts* are derived from Cicero, Saint Augustine, and Montaigne; others are prompted by the so-called Jansenistic miracles which were still agitating Paris, and found defenders among members of the Parliament; several of them advocate natural religion and that broader conception of God which Rousseau was going to make his own in the *Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar*. Shaftesbury however seems to be by far the most considerable source of inspiration for Diderot at this time; and his influence is worth tracing a little more closely in this book.

Atheism, the English philosopher had said, is less insulting to the Deity than superstition: the danger of new religions is not due to an influence of Hume on Diderot, but to a common inspiration from Shaftesbury, and a common reaction against the "modern miracles" of Jansenism.

“For my own part, says honest Plutarch, I had rather men should say of me, That there neither is nor ever was such a one as Plutarch; than they should say, There was a Plutarch, an unsteady, changeable, easily provokable, and revengeful man, *ἄνθρωπος ἀβέβαιος, εὐμετάβολος, εὐχερὴς πρὸς ὀργήν, μικρόλυντος*, etc. (Plutarch, *De Superstitione*).”<sup>11</sup>—This was transcribed by Diderot in his *Thought XII*. In Shaftesbury, it was but a commonplace of English philosophy, being an echo of Francis Bacon (*Essays*, XVII, “On Superstition”):

“It were better to have no opinion of God at all than such an opinion as is unworthy of him; for the one is unbelief, the other is contumely; and certainly superstition is the reproach of the Deity. . . . Atheism leaves a man to sense, to philosophy, to natural piety, to laws, to reputation: all which may be guides to an outward moral virtue, though religion were not; but superstition dismounts all these, and erecteth an absolute monarchy in the minds of men: therefore atheism did never perturb states; for it makes men wary of themselves, as looking no further, and we see the times inclined to atheism (as the time of Augustus Cæsar) were civil

<sup>11</sup> Shaftesbury, *Charact., Enthusiasm* (vol. I, p. 29, n.).

times; but superstition hath been the confusion of many states. . . ."

Shaftesbury distinguishes two kinds of atheists, one which absolutely denies and one which only doubts: "Now he who doubts may possibly lament his own unhappiness and wish to be convinced. He who denies is daringly presumptuous, and sets up an opinion against the interest of mankind and being of society."<sup>12</sup>—This is developed by Diderot as follows (*Th.*, XXII): "I distinguish three classes of atheists. Some tell you squarely that there is no God, and believe it: they are the true atheists; a fairly large number, not knowing what to think of the question, would be willing to settle it by tossing a coin: they are the sceptical atheists; many more, wishing that there were no God, pretend to be convinced that such is the case, and live as though they were: they are the braggards of the party. . . ."

A certain kind of "primitive zeal," Shaftesbury had said, does more harm than good to the religion which it designs to promote; yet it has been exhibited with great success on the

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, *The Moralists* (vol. II, p. 49).

public stage by Corneille in his tragedy of *Polyeucte*.<sup>13</sup>—Diderot writes: “Polyeucte nowadays would be nothing but a madman” (*Th.*, XL).

In connection with that same zeal of early Christians against idolatry, Shaftesbury goes on to show how grossly slandered the character of Julian, “that virtuous and gallant emperor,” has been by his enemies; and he proves the “humour and genius” as well as the spirit of tolerance of “the Apostate” by quoting at great length from his Letter to the Bostrens (Julian’s *Epistles*, No. 52), in which he bids the Galileans beware of raising any more commotions, and advises those who have remained faithful to the State religion to give them a good example of benevolence and kindness.—The vindication of Julian’s character which Shaftesbury appends to that quotation is transcribed by Diderot (the quotation and commentary constitute his *Thought XLIII*), yet in a condensed and pointed manner which is typical of the way in which the French philosopher used his English material. One might say that here the spirit

<sup>13</sup> *Charact., Miscell. Reflections* (vol. II, p. 210, n.).

of Voltaire and his very manner turn the "English boldness" into the greatest temerity. Shaftesbury had written:<sup>14</sup> "Thus the generous and mild emperor, whom we may indeed call heathen, but not so justly apostate, since being at different times of his youth transferred to different schools and universities, and bred under tutors of each religion, as well heathen as Christian, he happened, when of full age, to make his choice (though very unfortunately) in the former kind and adhered to the ancient religion of his country and forefathers."—This moderate apology becomes, in Diderot: "Such were the sentiments of that prince, whom we may reproach with heathenism, but not apostasy: he spent the early years of his life under different masters, and in different schools; and made, in a maturer age, an unfortunate choice: he unhappily made up his mind in favor of the form of worship of his ancestors, and the gods of his country."

Passing over about a hundred pages of Shaftesbury's *Miscellaneous Reflections*, Diderot alighted on another copious footnote,

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* (vol. II, p. 212, n.).

mostly made up of Latin quotations, concerning "the famed Gregorius, Bishop of Rome,"<sup>15</sup> and "his inveterate hatred to ancient learning." This provided an easy transition from *Thought XLIII* to the following, by a contrast between the character of the emperor and that of the bishop:

"What surprises me is, that the works of that learned emperor should have come down to us. They contain some traits which do no harm to the truth of Christianity, but which, being rather unfavorable to some Christians of his age, might have suffered from that particular attention with which the Fathers of the Church suppressed the works of their enemies. It was apparently from his predecessors that Saint Gregory the Great had inherited the barbarous zeal which animated him against letters and the arts. Had it only depended on that pontiff, we should now be in the same plight as the Mohammedans, whose whole reading is limited to their Alcoran.<sup>16</sup> For what might have been the

<sup>15</sup> *Charact., Miscell. Reflect.* (vol. II, p. 303, n.). It is interesting to note that Rousseau made use of this same illustration of religious zeal, comparing Pope Gregory to Caliph Omar, in his *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* (1750).

<sup>16</sup> A reminiscence of another passage in the *Miscell. Reflect.* (vol. II, p. 301).



fate of the ancient writers in the hands of a man who wrote solecisms out of religious principle, who fancied that to observe the rules of grammar was to make Jesus-Christ submit to Donatus, and who thought himself in duty bound to compass the ruin of antiquity?" (*Th.*, XLIV).

A critical edition of the *Philosophic Thoughts* would be needed to bring out the full extent of Diderot's indebtedness to Shaftesbury in that work. It may suffice here to give two more passages (*Th.*, XLV and LX), relating to the Bible, which are literally patchworks of extracts from Shaftesbury's *Miscellany V* (Chapters 1 and 3), made more pointed and aggressive in their condensation:

*Thought XLV.*—"However, the divine character of Scripture is not so clearly imprinted on it, that the authority of the sacred historians may be absolutely independent from the testimony of profane authors. Where should we be, if we had to recognize God's hand in the form of our Bible! How wretched the Latin version is! The originals themselves are not masterpieces of composition. The prophets, apostles, and evangelists have written as well as they knew. If we were allowed to consider the history of the Hebrews simply as a production of

the human mind, Moses and the writers who followed him would not rise above Livy, Sallust, Cæsar, and Josephus, persons who surely are not suspected of writing under inspiration. Do we not prefer even Berruyer the Jesuit to Moses? In our churches, some pictures are preserved which we are assured were painted by angels, and even by the Deity: if such pieces were from the hand of Le Sueur, or Le Brun, what could I object to that immemorial tradition? Nothing at all, perhaps. But when, observing those celestial works, I see the rules of painting violated at every step in the design and execution, the truth of art forsaken on all sides, if I am not allowed to suppose that the artist was an ignorant man, I must accuse the tradition of being a fable. How well I could apply the example of those paintings to the Scriptures, were I not aware that it matters very little whether their contents are well or ill expressed! The prophets claimed to speak true, not to speak well. Did the apostles die for anything but the truth of what they said or wrote? Now, to return to my point, how very important it was to preserve pagan authors who could not fail to agree with the sacred writers, at least concerning the existence and miracles of Jesus-Christ, the qualities and character of Pontius Pilate, and the deeds and martyrdom of the early Christians!"<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> It is a question whether Diderot, who somewhere boasts that he had been "fed on the milk of Homer,

*Thought LX.*—"You place before an infidel a volume of writings, the divine character of which you claim that you will demonstrate to him. But, before entering into an examination of your proofs, he will not fail to ask you some questions about that collection. Has it always been the same? he will ask. Why is it not so large at present as it was a few centuries ago? By what right has this or that book been banished, which by another sect is venerated, and this or that other book preserved which that sect has rejected? Upon what foundation have you preferred this manuscript? Who has led you in your choice among so many different copies, which are conclusive proofs that those sacred authors have not been transmitted to you in their original, primitive state of purity? But if the ignorance of copyists or the malice of heretics have corrupted them, as you must agree, then you are compelled to restore them to their natural state, before you prove their divine character; for it is not on a collection of mutilated writings that your proofs will hold good, and my belief rest. Now, whom will you entrust Moses and the prophets," was always so irresponsible as he here appears to be to the grandeur of the Biblical style. Here he simply echoes the classical banter of Shaftsbury, in *Charact., Miscell. V*, Chap. 1 (vol. II, p. 301, on the style of the Bible;—p. 297, on those holy pictures which fall very far short of "Raphael's" standards;—p. 305, on the silence of history on Pontius Pilate).

with that reform? The Church. But I cannot agree to the infallibility of the Church before the divine nature of Scripture is proved to me. Thus I am in an unavoidable state of scepticism.

"The difficulty can only be answered by acknowledging that the first foundations of the faith are purely human; that the selection among manuscripts, the restitution of passages, the collection itself was made according to some rules of criticism; and I am not unwilling to give to the divine character of the sacred books a degree of faith proportioned to the accuracy of those rules."

So truly was Shaftesbury's mind a leading light for Diderot as he first entered the dangerous path of philosophy, that reminiscences of the *Characteristics* are frequent in his other philosophic works of this and later periods.

In *The Sceptic's Walk*, which was seized by the police among Diderot's papers shortly after its composition (1747), and only published in 1830, the general frame, an introductory narrative mixed with dialogue, bears a fairly close resemblance to the opening pages of *The Moralists*.<sup>18</sup> The "genteel" character and enlightened

<sup>18</sup> *Charact.*, vol. II, pp. 3 ff.

mind of "Ariste," as well as the benevolent, humane scepticism of "Cléobule," prepare the reader for some such moral disquisitions as the English "Palemon," "Philocles," and "Theocles" were wont to indulge in, amidst rural surroundings which owed more to nature than to art. A spirit of wide toleration, and a free use of reason to test all human beliefs, are the distinguishing features of those philosophic characters. But, while Philocles and his friends discourse concerning the true, the good, and the beautiful in the abstract, in a Platonic manner, Ariste and Cléobule are concerned with the more immediate realities of religion and government: "Shall I dare ask you," says the former, "why religion and government are subjects on which we are forbidden to write? If truth and justice can only gain by my examination, it is ridiculous to forbid me to examine" (I, 181). Thus the bolder Diderot; whereas the wiser Diderot thinks, with Cléobule: "I do not blame you for endeavoring to enlighten men; it is the greatest service one can propose to render them, but it is the service also which will never be rendered to them. . . . Ariste, you have to deal not only

with people who know nothing, but with people who will not know anything. . . . Religion and government are sacred subjects which one is not allowed to touch. Those who stand at the helm of the Church and State would be sorely embarrassed if they had to give us a good reason for the silence which they impose upon us; but the safest thing is to obey and keep silent, unless we have found, up in the air, some fixed point beyond the reach of their bolts, from which we can announce the truth to them."

For want of such an aërial stronghold, Ariste, who insists on publishing a certain discourse of his friend's, must be prepared for the outcry of all the defenders of "artificial theology," as Bolingbroke used to say, against reason and natural religion. "Methinks I live in the times of Paul, at Ephesus," says Cléobule, echoing Shaftesbury,<sup>19</sup> "and that I hear the priests repeating on all sides the clamors that were formerly raised against him. 'If that man is right,' those relic-dealers will cry, 'our traffic is at an end, we have nothing to do but shut up our shops and starve.'"

Ariste-Diderot foresees these objections, of a

<sup>19</sup> *Charact., Miscell. Reflect.* (vol. II, p. 208).

commercial rather than metaphysical order, as clearly as Shaftesbury and Bolingbroke had done before him.<sup>20</sup> Yet it is his ambition "to write a good book, and avoid persecution." Cléobule's banter concerning that sort of "good books" brings us back by degrees to Shaftesbury's celebrated apology for the use of ridicule as a test of truth: "A sure means of gratifying your taste, without irritating anyone, would be to compose a long historical, dogmatical, critical dissertation, which nobody would read and which the superstitious could afford to leave unanswered. You would have the honor of resting on the same shelf with John Huss, Socin, Zwingli, Luther, and Calvin, and in a year's time people would hardly remember that you ever wrote. Whereas if you take up the tone of Bayle, Montaigne, Voltaire, Barclay, Woolston, Swift, or Montesquieu, you will doubtless run the risk of living longer; but how dear that advantage will cost you!" (I, 185). Whereupon Ariste asks, almost in Shaftesbury's own words, "why theologians are hostile to humor?"<sup>21</sup> It is

<sup>20</sup> Bolingbroke, *Letter to Mr. Pope*.

<sup>21</sup> *Charact., Enthusiasm* (vol. I, p. 10);—*On the Freedom of Wit and Humour* (vol. I, p. 47, and *passim*).

certain that nothing is more useful than good raillery, and it seems to me that nothing is more harmless than bad raillery. To apply ridicule wrongly is like breathing on a looking-glass. The vapor of your breath vanishes of itself, and the crystal becomes bright again. In truth, those grave gentlemen must either be bad humorists, or be ignorant that the true, the good, and the beautiful are not susceptible of ridicule, or harbor a great suspicion that these latter qualities are foreign to them."

The kind of philosophic satire in which *Didot* indulges in the remainder of *The Sceptic's Walk*, where he depicts under the transparent veils of a somewhat tedious allegory the religious people, the people of the world, and the various kinds of philosophers, in their respective paths of "Thorns," "Flowers," and "Chestnut-trees," is certainly not in the spirit of *Shaftesbury*, whose manner never was so bold. It was easy for a *Shaftesbury* or a *Bolingbroke*, English gentlemen of high station, with a natural inclination for some form of compromise even in their most radical free-thinking, to keep a certain reserve when they came to touch upon



civil and religious establishments, and to hold that some sort of worship should be maintained, at least for the rabble.<sup>22</sup> But Diderot was not restrained by any scruples or political considerations. Besides, as Leslie Stephen has rightly remarked, conditions were very different in England and France. "In England, the rational Protestant could meet the deist half way. The line of demarcation was shifting and uncertain, and it is hard to say in many cases whether the old traditional element, or the modern rationalising element, predominates. Persecution would be anomalous between sects so faintly discriminated. In Catholic France a rigid and unbending system was confronted by a thoroughgoing scepticism. Men of intellect could find no halfway resting-place, and could disguise their true sentiments with no shreds of orthodox belief. What passed for Christianity

<sup>22</sup> Bolingbroke, *Letter to Mr. Pope* (1753 ed., p. 486): Between excessive free-thinking and a tyrannical religious zeal, "is there no middle path, in which a reasonable man and a good citizen may direct his steps?"—And Shaftesbury (*Charact.*, vol. I, p. 14), quoting Harrington: "'Tis necessary a people should have a *public leading* in religion."—It is well known that both Voltaire and Hume held a similar theory.

in England would have been rank heresy in France; and thus the Catholic Church, unable to come to terms with the rationalists, met them by a free use of the weapons of authority."<sup>23</sup> Diderot's use of ridicule, in *The Sceptic's Walk*, would surely have involved him in very serious difficulties with the defenders of the established faith if he had been rash enough to publish what he had had the boldness to write. But he never was able to recover his manuscript from the hands of the police.

In the same year 1747 he wrote a short work on *The Sufficiency of Natural Religion*, which affects the mathematical form of demonstration used by Clarke and Wollaston<sup>24</sup> on the same subject. He resembles more the latter than the former, in that he does not concern himself with vindicating the Christian religion together with the religion dictated by nature and reason. On the contrary, Christianity is only introduced in order to show that the natural religion is of greater "sufficiency" and excellence, and should supersede it. ✓

<sup>23</sup> Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the eighteenth century*, Chap. II, § 13.

<sup>24</sup> Clarke, *Boyle Lectures*, 1704-1705; Wollaston, *The Religion of Nature delineated*, 1722.

The *Letter on the Blind, for the use of those who see*, published in 1749, caused the arrest and imprisonment of Diderot; not so much because of its contents, which seem to have been but little considered or understood, as because of a disparaging remark concerning the eyes of Mme Dupré de Saint-Maur, a friend of D'Argenson, then Minister of War. This book may be said to be the last in which Diderot the moralist and philosopher tried to express his opinions with some degree of freedom. The treatment which he received as a consequence of its publication could have been much more severe; but it sufficed to make him vividly mindful of "the history and persecutions of the men who had the misfortune of finding the truth in ages of darkness, and the imprudence of revealing it to their blind contemporaries" (I, 290). The ideas which must have appeared most obnoxious to the orthodox in the *Letter on the Blind*, and which served as a pretext to D'Argenson not only to avenge his lady friend, but also to "pay his court and show himself a great minister,"<sup>25</sup> were not the theories relating to

<sup>25</sup> Such is the view of the matter taken by his brother, the Marquis d'Argenson, in his *Memoirs* (August, 1749).

the psychological experiments on the blind suggested to Locke by Molyneux,<sup>26</sup> performed by Cheselden, and discussed by Voltaire. Diderot had dared go further, and, starting from the principle that "the state of our organs and our senses has a great deal of influence on our metaphysics and ethics" (I, 288-289), he conceived that "that great proof (of God's existence) derived from the wonders of nature is very weak for blind people." Yet, as he could not very well demonstrate this proposition without incurring the risk of being assailed by "certain people, who make a crime of everything," he came to his paradox in a roundabout manner, by introducing in his *Letter* a famous professor of mathematics who was blind, Nicholas Saunderson.

Thus, after timidly expounding rationalistic ethics in a free translation of Shaftesbury, then rational religion in anonymous quotations from the *Characteristics* and demonstrations in the

<sup>26</sup> The "problem of Molyneux" had first been proposed and discussed by Locke, in his *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Book II, Chap. IX (*Of Perception*), §§ 8-10, "Ideas of sensation often changed by the judgment."

manner of Wollaston, Diderot now proceeded to criticize the main argument of both deism and revealed religion in favor of God's existence, yet still under the guise of "English boldness." But, on this last occasion, the mask of foreign authority was, with the exception of one more reminiscence from Shaftesbury, entirely fictitious. The "land of thinkers" here served the same purpose as Montesquieu's Persia, or other geographical fictions of eighteenth-century philosophers: it was merely a shield against persecution; England was a sort of unaccountable land of heresy and free-thinking for the productions of which a French writer should not be held responsible when he translated them.

Nicholas Saunderson, or Sanderson, born in 1682, had lost his sight when he was but twelve months old. He succeeded however in becoming very proficient in mathematics; in 1707 he went to Cambridge, and taught classes in Newtonian philosophy, particularly in hydrostatics, mechanics, acoustics, astronomy, the science of tides, and optics. In 1711 he succeeded Whiston, who had been expelled from the University. Lord Chesterfield, who attended some

of his courses from 1712 to 1714, described him as a professor without eyes who taught others how to use their own. He died April 19, 1739. The following year his *Algebra*<sup>27</sup> was published, with a Memoir of his Life and Character by his friends, Dr Thomas Nettleton, Dr Richard Wilkes, the Rev. J. Boldero, the Rev. Gervas Holmes, the Rev. Granville Wheeler, and Dr Richard Davies. In 1751 appeared his *Method of Fluxions applied to a Select Number of Useful Problems*.

Diderot declares (I, 304) that he had looked through Saunderson's *Elements of Algebra*, with the hope of finding there what he wanted to learn concerning the metaphysics of the blind, from those who had known the famous professor intimately and acquainted us with some particulars of his life. But his curiosity had been disappointed. He thought that elements of geometry by the blind mathematician would have been a work more singular in itself and more interesting to us. His definitions of lines,

<sup>27</sup> *The Elements of Algebra*, in ten books, by Nicholas Saunderson, LL.D., 2 vols, Camb., 1740.—Translated into French by M. de Joncourt, *Elémens d'Algèbre de M. Saunderson* . . . , 2 vols, Paris, 1756.

points, surfaces, angles, would have been based on very abstract metaphysical notions, somewhat resembling those of subjective idealism, "an extravagant system which, I think, could owe its birth to blind men only," yet a system which, "to the shame of the human mind and philosophy, is the most difficult to combat, although the most absurd of all."<sup>28</sup>

But, to return to the point from which our philosopher had been wandering, what might be Saunderson's theology? He was said to have been a man of outspoken opinions in general,<sup>29</sup> —possibly a deist. But the Memoir of his Life gave an edifying account, on the whole, of his attitude towards religion:

"It would be thought an omission in these Memoirs of the Life of Dr Saunderson, if no notice were taken of the manner in which he resigned it. The Reverend Mr Gervas Holmes informed him, that the mortification gained so much ground that his best friends could entertain no hopes of his recovery. He received this notice of his approaching death with great

<sup>28</sup> In *The Sceptic's Walk* (I, 218–219), Diderot had attempted a rather weak refutation of Berkeley's immaterialism.

<sup>29</sup> *Dict. of National Biogr.*, "Saunderson."

calmness and serenity, and after a short silence, resumed life and spirits, and talked with as much composure of mind as he had ever done in his most sedate hours of perfect health. He appointed the evening of the following day to receive the sacrament with Mr Holmes; but before that came, he was seized with a delirium, which continued to his death."<sup>30</sup>

Here also Diderot must have been "disappointed." His imagination then supplied what the book did not give him, and he wrote a sequel, or complement, concerning the last moments of Saunderson, in an original manner that was to be characteristic of some of his best works later on.<sup>31</sup> Like his favorite Montaigne, he delighted to make his reading a matter for independent thought and composition; and, like Montaigne again, he "busied himself with forming rather than dissipating clouds, and with suspending judgments rather than with judging" (I, 369-370). But this undogmatic manner of thinking merely for the sake of thinking,

<sup>30</sup> Saunderson, *Elements of Algebra*, vol. I, p. xix.

<sup>31</sup> For instance, *D'Alembert's Dream*, based on a conversation, probably not imaginary; the *Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage*, and *Jacques le Fataliste*, inspired by books which Diderot had read; etc.



and this sceptical enjoyment of an argument for its intrinsic logic rather than for its practical value, are not to everybody's taste: Diderot must have been amused at the wrath which was excited in England, and particularly in the Royal Society, by a mystification which turned Saunderson into a champion of atheism.<sup>32</sup>

Being very sorry that he could derive so little interesting information from the Memoir on Saunderson,—“those who lived with him must have been most unphilosophic people!” (I, 312)—Diderot claimed to have drawn a better account of Saunderson's death from a book by his disciple, Mr William Inchliff,<sup>33</sup> printed in 1747 in Dublin with this title, given in English by the French philosopher, for more verisimilitude: *The Life and Character of Dr Nicholas Saunderson, late Lucasian Professor of the Mathematics in the University of Cambridge; by his disciple and friend William Inchliff, Esq.*

<sup>32</sup> J. Morley, *Diderot* . . . , vol. I, p. 91.

<sup>33</sup> Or “Hinchliff,” which is the same thing to French ears. There has been a J. E. Hinchliff, sculptor (1777–1867), and a John Hinchliffe, bishop of Peterborough (1731–1794); but there is no record left of the Englishman whose patronymic Diderot borrowed in 1749.

Barring the fictitious "Inchliff," the date, and the place, all is transcribed from the title-page of the *Elements of Algebra*. And this is how Diderot imagines Saunderson's last conversation, which never took place, with the Rev. Gervas Holmes (I, 307 ff.) :

"When he was on the point of death, a very learned clergyman, Mr Gervaise Holmes, was called to his bedside; they had a conversation concerning the existence of God, of which some fragments remain that I am going to translate for you as best I may, for they are well worth the trouble. The minister began by objecting to him the wonders of nature: 'Hey, Sir,' said the blind philosopher, 'leave all that beautiful spectacle which was never made for me! I have been condemned to spend my life in darkness; and you talk to me of prodigies which I do not understand, and which are proofs only for you and those who see like you. If you wish me to believe in God, you must make me touch him.'

—" 'Sir,' the minister cleverly replied, 'feel yourself with your own hands, and you will find the Deity in the wonderful mechanism of your organs.'

—" 'Mr Holmes,' said Saunderson, 'I tell you again, all that is not so fine for me as it is for you. But, were the animal mechanism as wonderful as you claim it is, and as I am willing to believe, for you are an honest gentleman,

quite incapable of imposing upon me, what has it in common with a supremely intelligent being? If it surprises you, that is perhaps because you are in the habit of treating as a prodigy whatever seems to you beyond your strength. I have attracted from the remotest parts of England people who could not conceive how I studied geometry: you must acknowledge that those people had no very distinct notions about the possibility of things. Is a certain phenomenon, according to us, above man? we say at once, *It is the work of a God*; our vanity is not content with less. Might we not put a little less pride in our talk, and a little more philosophy? If nature offers us some knot hard to untie, let us leave it for what it is; and let us not, in order to cut it, resort to the hand of a being which afterwards turns out to be another knot even more difficult to untie than the first. Ask an Indian why the world remains suspended in the air, he will reply that it is carried on the back of an elephant; and on what will he rest the elephant? on a tortoise; and the tortoise, who will support it? . . . That Indian seems pitiable to you; yet one might say to you as to him: Mr Holmes, my good friend, confess your ignorance first of all, and spare me the elephant and the tortoise.’”

This “elephant and tortoise” illustration, used against the *obscurum per obscurius* way of

reasoning, had been first introduced by Locke, in his criticism of the idea of substance (*Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Bk. II, Ch. 13, § 19,—and again Ch. 23, § 2). It had been further developed by his disciple Shaftesbury (*Charact., The Moralists*, vol. II, p. 15), to criticize the solutions given to the problem of the origin of evil. From Shaftesbury Diderot appears to have taken both the idea and the illustration, in § XXII of his *Sufficiency of Natural Religion*, where he boldly applies to the story of Adam the ridicule which Shaftesbury seemed to cast on the myth of Prometheus only. In that instance Diderot had ascribed the elephant and tortoise theory to a "Chinois"; here he reverted to the original "Indian."

To Diderot's criticism of the cosmological proof of God's existence, Voltaire retorted that he "did not at all agree with Saunderson, who denied God because he happened to have been born blind" (Letter to Diderot, June, 1749). But this answer does not dispose of the whole argument. Diderot meant to show the weakness of reasoning from the data of our senses in such a weighty subject, and, as he had done in his

*Philosophic Thoughts*, to point out the trifling value of wonders or miracles where a rational proof would serve the purpose much better. Shaftesbury had asserted that "the contemplation of the universe, its laws and government, was the only means which could establish the sound belief of a Deity. For what though innumerable miracles from every part assailed the sense and gave the trembling thought no respite? . . . To whom the laws of this universe and its government appear just and uniform, to him they speak the government of one Just One; to him they reveal and witness a God. . . ." Revelation and miracles may afterwards confirm this belief in a just and true being, but the existence of such a being "no power of miracles, nor any power besides his reason, can make him know or apprehend."<sup>34</sup> In this Diderot partly follows, and partly disagrees with, his master: after denying with him the power of miracles to convince reason (*Philosophic Thoughts*, L), he now tried to show against him how unphilosophic and inconclusive the sense of wonder was

<sup>34</sup> Shaftesbury, *Charact., The Moralists* (vol. II, pp. 91-92).

even in relation to the normal state of the universe. Was it such a wonderful order after all? Was not the world full of evils and imperfections which only the systematic optimist chose to ignore? When we admire the arrangement of our world, and claim that its final cause is the happiness of mankind, are we not like ants and worms dwelling among heaps of earth and refuse in some back garden, and marvelling at the intelligent benevolence of the gardener who has arranged all those materials for them?<sup>35</sup> Diderot, as we have already seen, had from the beginning taken exception at Shaftesbury's philosophic optimism. He was now led to find that, without an implicit faith in the perfect order of the world, it was difficult to uphold the deistic belief that the universe was "not a self-governed but a God-governed machine."<sup>36</sup> The vacillation evinced in 1747 in *The Sceptic's Walk* disappears in 1749 in the *Letter on the*

<sup>35</sup> Thus "Atheos" had answered the arguments of the deist (then identical with Diderot) in the "Path of Chestnut-Trees" (§§ 33-36); and his case had been made out rather strong against the celebrated metaphor of the "Watchmaker."

<sup>36</sup> Shaftesbury, *Charact., The Moralists* (vol. II, p. 93).

*Blind.* The scientific attitude replaces the deist's natural religion; Shaftesbury gives way to Lucretius; and, where English Deism and Voltaire rested satisfied, Diderot evolves, in Saunderson's parting words, the first outline of a theory of the universe which is identical with that of modern transformism.

Admitting, upon the word of Newton, Leibnitz, Clarke, and honest Mr Holmes, that there is a wonderful order in that universe which his eyes had never seen, Saunderson goes on to say (I, 309):

"I yield to you concerning the present state of the universe, on condition that you will allow me the liberty to think what I please about its ancient, original state, concerning which you are not less blind than I. Here you have no witnesses to oppose to me, and your eyes are of no avail. Imagine then, if you wish, that the order which strikes you has existed always; but let me believe that it is not so, and that if we went back to the birth of things and ages, if we felt matter moving and chaos assuming shape, we should meet with a multitude of shapeless beings against a few well-organized creatures. If I have nothing to object to you about the present condition of things, I may at least ask you about their past condition. I may for instance

ask you, who told you, and Leibnitz, Clarke, and Newton, that when animals were first formed, some were not without heads, and some without feet? I may assert that some had no stomachs, others no bowels; that those creatures which, having a stomach, palate and teeth, seemed likely to endure, have ceased to exist, because of some defect in the heart or lungs; that monsters have successively been destroyed; that all defective combinations of matter have disappeared, and that only those remained in which the mechanism implied no important contradiction, which could subsist by their own means and perpetuate themselves."

These ideas, it must be remembered, offered nothing that appeared very striking to eighteenth-century thinkers. To us, they are like a prophetic view of biological theories that have revolutionized modern science; and we shall endeavor to consider them in their proper scientific aspect in the next chapter. For Voltaire and his contemporaries, and even for Villemain as late as 1828, they were but a development, a sort of reboiling, of the most ancient materialistic system of the universe, the physics of Epicurus expounded by Lucretius in his poem *De Rerum Natura*. They meant little more



than that Diderot, after having for a time defended rational ethics and rational religion on the same grounds as the English deists, had discovered that the foundations of natural religion were as undemonstrable, rationally, as those of the revealed religions, and that he had no other alternative than to fall back upon that least unsatisfactory system of materialism which for ages past had been adopted by the most radical free-thinkers, though not yet indorsed by scientists. Concerning the origin of the universe and life, the choice lay between the Biblical account of Creation and the hypotheses of the Atomistic School, between Genesis and the six books of the *De Rerum Natura*; concerning the present order of the world, between the belief in Providence and final causes, and the faith in a mechanical universe governed by scientific laws. While Voltaire refused to abandon deism and creationism, yet pointed out many objections to the belief in Providence, finality, and optimism, Diderot declared his preference for the Lucretian solutions, denying creation, final causes, and Providence, declaring God "unknowable" scientifically, and limiting his philosophy, long be-

fore Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, to the knowledge of positive reality, the observation of phenomena and the investigation of their laws. The two letters of Voltaire and Diderot concerning the *Letter on the Blind* illustrate in a significant manner the parting of the ways not only between their authors, but between the two generations of French philosophers which belong to the first and the second half of the eighteenth century. They also mean a final separation between Diderot's philosophy and English deism.

That he was not, however, a systematic materialist is shown by the fact that he no longer concerned himself with advancing the philosophy of mechanism or atomism in the abstract, or in shaping a metaphysical theory of his own. This task he left to Helvétius, Holbach, and Naigeon; the last two soon engaged in translating the most audacious English works, written earlier in the century by Toland, Tindal, and others, for the promotion of systematic atheism. The "fury of systematizing" did not appeal to Diderot, and he criticized the weak points in the materialistic arguments of Helvétius with as

much independence as he had done those of the English deists. If we apply to him Comte's division of the intellectual ages of mankind, we may say that before 1745 he had already passed the "theological age"; between 1745 and 1749, he lived through his "metaphysical age"; and in 1750 he entered the "positive age," resolving to confine himself to the study of nature, believing with Locke that nothing could be known except through the senses, and with Bacon that the investigation of nature was the most useful task of all.

He had in this metaphysical period devoted enough attention to philosophic speculation to find it as unsatisfactory in its results as it was dangerous to his life and liberty. His thought during those few years may be said to have been dominated, though not in any sense ruled, by the influence of English philosophy, and particularly of Shaftesbury. The *Characteristics*, as they directed his attention to the problem of morality, at the same time trained his mind in abstract reflections on the nature of art and of the beautiful, and thus were not an inconsiderable factor in the formation of his esthetic criti-

cism. Furthermore, one may find the suggestion at least of his last philosophic work, the *Essay on the reigns of Claudius and Nero*, in a footnote of the *Characteristics* which outlined an apology for Seneca, as "mitigator and moderator" of Nero's tyranny, "an able minister, and honest courtier," and pointed out the source of current prejudices against the Roman philosopher in the writings of "that apish shallow historian and court flatterer, Dion Cassius."<sup>37</sup>

What high regard Diderot always preserved for Shaftesbury, even long after he had lost his early enthusiasm for the "divine anchorite," will appear from the parallel which he drew between him and Locke, in the article "Génie" of the *Encyclopédie* (*Euv.*, XV, 39):

"The true and the false, in philosophic productions, are not the distinguishing characters of *genius*. There are very few errors in Locke, and too few truths in Mylord Shaftesbury: the

<sup>37</sup> Shaftesbury, *Charact., Miscell. Reflect.* (vol. II, p. 169, n.). Diderot's apology for Seneca seems also to owe something to Montaigne's *Essais*, Liv. II, ch. 32, "Defence de Seneque et de Plutarque."

former however is nothing but a comprehensive, penetrating, precise intellect; and the latter is a genius of the first rank. Locke saw; Shaftesbury created, constructed, edified: to Locke we owe great truths perceived in a frigid manner, methodically followed up, drily announced; to Shaftesbury, brilliant systems often lacking in sound foundations, yet full of sublime truths; and, in his moments of error, he still pleases and persuades by the charms of his eloquence."

Before he left Shaftesbury, Clarke, Wollaston, and all deistic systems, before he abandoned the ungrateful task of framing beliefs which could not satisfactorily be demonstrated but only raised new doubts, Diderot had not lost sight of scientific research and theory, for which he had had a great inclination since his youth. From the first, even in metaphysics, he had been a realist; thus he could not suffer Berkeley's subjective idealism, while he felt all the force of its demonstrations, and he always was more or less irritated by the amoralism of Hobbes and Mandeville, although it was the logical consequence of a materialism to which he was not averse. From Shaftesbury, for whom he always entertained a sort of veneration,

through Locke's philosophy of sensation, in which his faith never wavered, he worked his way back, as it were, to the fountain-head of English philosophy and the father of positivistic thought, Francis Bacon.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SCIENTIST

“DEVOTE yourselves to metaphysics as much as you please; as for me, I am a physicist and a chemist” (II, 66). Thus wrote Diderot in 1770, at the end of a period of scientific work which had occupied more than twenty years of his life.

Just as, in the deistic phase of his thought, he had shared Shaftesbury's dislike for “enthusiasm,” meaning the unreasoning impulses of fanaticism, so in philosophy he had early professed the same contempt as the author of the *Characteristics* for all metaphysical systems and their authors. In a remarkable passage of the *Bijoux Indiscrets*, he had depicted, under the guise of a vision (*Rêve de Mangogul*), the downfall of all the systems of ontology at the apparition of the giant child called Experience. “The most ingenious way of becoming foolish is by a system,”<sup>1</sup> Shaftesbury had said; and

<sup>1</sup> *Charact., Advice to an Author*, p. iii, sect. 1. In *Miscell.*, V, Shaftesbury disposes of Cartesianism in his usual tone of banter.

the word "systematic" was used by him and his followers as characterizing speculations as barren as those of Aristotle and the Scholastics, didactic constructions in which an outward appearance of order and logic served as a vain cloak to ideas that had no relation to experience. Shaftesbury also described systematic thinkers, that is, all kinds of metaphysicians, as "a sort of moon-blind wits who, though very acute and able in their kind, may be said to renounce daylight and extinguish, in a manner, the bright visible outside world, by allowing us to know nothing besides what we can prove by strict and formal demonstration."<sup>2</sup>

As Locke's experimental philosophy had gained ground in England, then in France, and "natural philosophy," or science, had constantly grown in favor, constructive metaphysics had lost more and more credit everywhere. Descartes's attempt at solving the riddle of the universe by the method of mathematics had been followed by the systems of Malebranche, Spinoza, and Leibnitz, which, because they appealed to pure reason, and not at all to experi-

<sup>2</sup> *Charact., Miscell.*, IV, Chapt. II.



ence, had made the *a priori* method of reasoning unpopular, and brought down a great deal of undeserved obloquy upon Cartesianism. In the latter half of the seventeenth century, Rationalism had inspired philosophers and scientists alike, but divergences existed between the spirit of metaphysical, *a priori* Rationalism and the spirit of the experimental, *a posteriori* school, which sometimes had brought them into a sort of conflict. For instance, Spinoza and Leibnitz, though they admired the work of the English Royal Society, thought that Boyle was taking needless trouble in attempting to demonstrate experimentally that the "substantial forms" and "qualities" of bodies, *i. e.*, their properties, were effects of the order and movement of their particles: what need was there of such proofs, when the fact had been rationally demonstrated by Bacon and Descartes? ". . . Nescio cur Clar. Vir hoc adeo sollicite conetur colligere ex hoc suo experimento; cum jam hoc a Verulamio et postea a Cartesio satis superque demonstratum sit" (Spinoza to Oldenburg, Oct. 21, 1661). And Leibnitz (*Nouveaux Essais*, L. IV, Ch. 12, § 13): "M. Boyle s'arrête un peu trop, pour dire la

vérité, à ne tirer d'une infinité de belles expériences d'autre conclusion que celle qu'il pourrait prendre pour principe, savoir, que *tout se fait mécaniquement dans la nature*; principe qu'on peut rendre certain par la seule raison, et jamais par les expériences, quelque nombre qu'on en fasse."<sup>3</sup> Matters had grown worse, if we may say so, between the metaphysical and the experimental rationalists, when from the criticism of the "secondary qualities" of matter, which stood in the way of science as well as philosophy, Berkeley had proceeded to criticize rationally and reduce to naught the "primary qualities," concluding with a system of immaterialism which, as we have seen, confounded and irritated Diderot by its appearance of irrefragable evidence.

It is hardly to be wondered at, that, in the general reaction against all ontological systems which characterized the eighteenth century, while Locke was highly praised and Berkeley ridiculed, not the slightest attention was paid to the most remarkable philosophy produced in

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Ch. Adam, *Philosophie de Fr. Bacon*, Paris, 1890, p. 332, n. 2.

that age, the Phenomenism of Hume, which gave rise later on to Kant's "Copernican revolution" in metaphysics. Hume's system, as expounded in the *Treatise on Human Nature*, was apparently unknown to his friend Diderot. Of course Diderot also believed that we never know anything but phenomena of consciousness, as he poetically expresses it in the Conclusion of his *Elements of Physiology* (IX, 428): "The world is the house of fate.<sup>4</sup> Only at the end shall I know what I have lost or gained in this vast gambling-house in which I shall have spent some sixty years, dice-box in hand, *tesseras agitans*.

*Felices quibus, ante annos, secura malorum  
Atque ignara sui, per ludum elabitur ætas.*

What do I see? Forms. And what else? Forms. I do not know the thing. We walk among shadows, and we also are shadows for

<sup>4</sup>Here I read "sort," instead of "fort," which is evidently an erratum in the Assézat-Tourneux edition, where the *Elements* were first printed. The erroneous reading, "Le monde est la maison du fort," led E. Caro to suggest that Diderot might have thought here of the struggle-for-life theory (E. Caro, *La fin du dix-huitième siècle*, 2d edition, 1881, p. 203).

other people and for ourselves."—Yet he was a phenomenist only as any scientist might be. He did not believe that things in themselves, substances, could be known: but he never questioned the absolute value of the laws laid down by the understanding as governing the world of matter. He thought that man knows nothing but forms, facts, phenomena; but they are the object of science, the knowable part of the universe. Concerning all that transcends them, there is no science, nothing but more or less plausible speculation.

Later on, about the time when metaphysics had, as it were, a new birth in Kant's critique, we find Diderot tolling the knell of speculative philosophy: he was writing to Catherine II that the age was most propitious for the foundation of Universities, especially in Russia, and he said: "The human mind seems to have cast off its shackles; the futility of Scholastic studies is acknowledged; the rage for systematizing has ceased; there is no more any talk about Aristotelianism, Cartesianism, Malebranchism, or Leibnitzianism; the taste for true science reigns everywhere; knowledge of all kinds has been

carried to a very high degree of perfection" (III, 441). In other words, a strong revival of the Positivist spirit which had first shone with Bacon early in the seventeenth century, and which was to reappear in the nineteenth with Auguste Comte, had for a time driven metaphysics out of fashion, and obscured, in the most representative thinkers of the age, its high character and deep interest. If the proper object of philosophy is truly the investigation of the principles of human knowledge which are beyond the range of experimental science, no school of thinkers was more unphilosophic than that eighteenth century school of Shaftesbury, Voltaire, Diderot, which ridiculed "systematic" thought and identified philosophy with science.

In the domain of science itself, the reaction against the constructive mechanism of the Cartesians, who had freely used hypotheses in their demonstrations, brought about a strong prejudice against all hypotheses. Newton's saying, *Hypotheses non fingo*, was constantly repeated, and taken in too strict a sense. Newtonians were apt to overlook the fact that gravitation itself was only a magnificent hypothesis. This

confusion arose from an inadequate perception of the differences between the metaphysical and the scientific kind of hypothesis, and was natural at a time when, the word "philosophy" having kept much of its ancient universal meaning, the boundaries between "first" philosophy and "natural" philosophy, metaphysics and science, were not yet very distinctly perceived. A metaphysical hypothesis appeared as a self-evident, self-sufficient principle, not susceptible of experimental confirmation, and claiming not to need proofs any more than the first principles of mathematics: the assumption of the existence of vacuum, or of ether, the "corpuscles" of matter, the "vortices" of the universe, belonged to that class of conjectural principles upon which the eighteenth-century thinkers looked with diffidence or contempt. A scientific hypothesis, on the other hand, as we admit of it to-day, is a merely provisional principle, subject to proof or rejection under the tests of experiment, and is as necessary to the progress of scientific investigation as is the process of induction, of which it is a powerful auxiliary: for how could one resort to observation and experiment in a

useful way, without a preconceived explanation of phenomena to conduct research, even if it eventually failed to be proved?

Thus scientific thought in the eighteenth century, through an excessive distrust of the indiscreet speculations in which the later Cartesians had indulged,<sup>5</sup> tended to ignore the necessity of hypothesis and system in the investigation of nature, while it emphasized the need of an abundant, indefatigable observation and collection of facts. All the credit which Des-

<sup>5</sup> Ch. Adam, in his work cited above (p. 374), to which we are here much indebted, points out that the reaction against Descartes, while extolling Bacon, did not altogether blind the more scientific minds of the age to the merits of the French philosopher. Fontenelle did not indiscriminately blame his boldness in speculation: "One must dare in every kind; but the difficulty is to dare with wisdom, and that is to reconcile a contradiction." He commended "a lucky and wise boldness" in science. D'Alembert, in 1751, complained of too much timidity in Bacon, and compared Descartes with those revolutionists who at least prepare the future by destroying the past, even if the new régime which they set up does not realize their dreams. Lastly, at the end of the century, Condorcet also thought Bacon too prudent, and admired Descartes as a conqueror in science, who forces truth before it surrenders: "the very boldness of his errors served the progress of the human mind better" than Bacon had done.

cartes was losing, as the most systematic of the fathers of modern science, was a gain for the more empiric Bacon and the less universal but more successful genius of Newton.

Diderot, who had been freer than Voltaire in his criticism of the systems concerning the Deity, showed much more reserve than his great contemporary in his estimate of metaphysical systems. In spite of his positivistic professions and his fondness for facts and realities, he was himself by nature too much of a metaphysician not to appreciate to some extent the true greatness of the synthetic constructions erected in the past to account for all that transcends the senses and experience, and the originality of other methods than the positive method of Bacon and Locke. While Voltaire had been indefatigable in denouncing the system of Descartes and refuting it by ridicule, Diderot only once had a fling at the "vorticoses," or partisans of the Cartesian theory of vortices, in a chapter of the *Bijoux Indiscrets* (IV, 162); and, although on that occasion he sided against them with the "attractionnaires" or Newtonians, he never professed the same worship as Voltaire



for the discoverer of the law of gravitation: for was not gravitation in itself as obscure a principle as the vortices?<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, comparing Malebranche with Locke, his great master in philosophy, he did not hesitate to write: "Malebranche was one of the deepest and most sublime dreamers. One page of Locke contains more truths than all the volumes of Malebranche; but one line of the latter perhaps shows more subtlety, imagination, penetration, and genius, than the whole of Locke's big book" (XVI, 53).

In one of his most Baconian works, he sums up in a characteristic manner the tendencies and the results of the metaphysical and the physical schools of philosophy up to his own time: "To collect and to connect facts, are two very tedious occupations; therefore philosophers have divided them between themselves. Some spend their lives in gathering materials, useful and active

\*Diderot, though full of respect for Newton, had no patience with his less intelligent followers: "Men want to explain everything, well or ill, no matter; owing to this mania, the abhorrence for vacuum has caused water to rise in pumps, vortices have been the cause of the motions of celestial bodies, and for a long time yet attraction will be the cause of the weight of bodies . . ." (*Mémoires . . . mathém.*, IX, 115).

artisans; others, proud architects, hasten to make use of the materials. But, up to the present, time has overthrown almost all the edifices of rational philosophy. Sooner or later, from the subterranean galleries where he digs blindly, the dusty workman brings up the piece that proves fatal to all that architecture raised by sheer intellect; down it comes, and nothing is left but the materials in pell-mell confusion, until some other rash genius undertakes to make a new combination of them. Happy is the systematic philosopher to whom nature has given, as she formerly gave to Epicurus, Lucretius, Aristotle, and Plato, a powerful imagination, great eloquence, the art of expounding his ideas with striking, sublime images! The edifice he has reared may fall one day; but his statue shall remain standing in the midst of ruins; and the stone rolling down the mountain-side shall not shatter it, because the feet thereof are not of clay.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Pensées sur l'interprétation de la nature*, XXI (*Œuv.*, II, 19).—Comp. Montesquieu, *Observations sur l'histoire naturelle*, 1721, read before the Academy of Sciences of Bordeaux: “A man does not need a great deal of wit to see a gnat in the microscope, or a star through great

Diderot as a scientist partook of both characters: he was to some extent a patient working-man in the field of nature; he also was a "dreamer," or a speculative thinker, who did not fear to rise from the particularity of facts to the generality of no less vast a theory than Evolutionism. In science, he may be said to have had two masters: Bacon, for the collection of facts; and the ancient school of Atomism, which he knew mostly through Lucretius,<sup>8</sup> for

telescopes, and that is the point in which physical science is so wonderful: great geniuses, narrow minds, mean intellects, all play their part in it; he who cannot frame a system, like Newton, will make an observation with which he may rack that great philosopher."—"Yet," he adds, "Newton will always be Newton, that is, the successor of Descartes, and the other a common man, a low artisan, who has seen once and may never have thought." (Quoted by Ch. Adam, *op. cit.*, p. 360.)

\*The poem of Lucretius was translated into French by Lagrange, and published, after a revision by Naigeon, in 1768; both Diderot and Holbach had been interested in, and to some extent connected with, the undertaking. Abundant quotations from Lucretius are found in Diderot's writings about 1767 and 1768 (XI, 33, 76, 78, 164, 331; XIII, 18, 94, n.; etc.), and *D'Alembert's Dream* was written in 1769. For some years past Diderot had been concerned with the question of the influence of functions on the modification of organs: see his *Salon of 1765*, in which the connection between his scientific and his esthetic ideas is curiously illustrated.

the connection of phenomena and their higher interpretation. Since his philosophic generalizations are essentially of a concrete nature, based on scientific observations which were new in his age, and since they are closely connected with his studies in chemistry and natural history, we shall feel justified in giving them a fuller consideration in this chapter than in our preceding estimate of the Philosopher.

He had early been much interested in mathematics, probably before he was more absorbed by physiology, physics, chemistry, and their applications to the needs of man. He was not content with giving private lessons, in which he "learned while teaching others, and made some proficient pupils"; he attempted to do some original work. Hence his commentary on Newton's *Principles of Mathematics*, which he suppressed when Fathers Jacquier and Le Sueur published theirs (IX, 168), and his five *Memoirs on sundry subjects of mathematics*, which appeared in 1748 to redeem the impression created by his frivolous novel, the *Bijoux Indiscrets*. We know from Diderot himself

(IX, 252) that of all his works he valued most a certain mathematical dissertation and *D'Alembert's Dream*.

The volume of *Memoirs of Mathematics* was elegantly illustrated with emblematic cuts by a certain "N. Blakey, Londineus,"<sup>9</sup> and was typical of those scientific works which eighteenth-century writers designed for the ladies' drawing-room tables as well as for the scholars' or scientists' shelves. Its contents are far from being of a trifling nature; they are indeed more fit to be judged by the distinguished mathematician, Madame de Prémontval, to whom they were dedicated, than by modern students of literary history. Let us at least point out that these papers evince a great degree of familiarity with the state of some scientific problems at that time, abroad as well as in France.

The First Memoir deals with the "general principles of the science of sound, with a singular method of fixing the sound, so that one

<sup>9</sup> Nicholas Blakey, a designer and engraver, born in Ireland, spent the greater part of his life in Paris; he is said to have acquired much repute as an illustrator of books; the dates of his birth and his death are not known (*Dict. Nat. Biogr.*).

may at any time and in any place play a piece of music in exactly the same tone." In this work Diderot alludes to the determination of the speed of sound by Halley and Flamsteed, and the experiments made by Derham concerning the influence of a favorable or contrary wind on its transmission. He further discusses and corrects the solution given by Taylor, a contemporary of Newton, to the problem of the relation between the number of vibrations of a chord in a given time and its length, weight, and tension. Passing over the Second Memoir, on the circle-wrapper (*la développante du cercle*), and the Third, on the tension of chords, we notice that the Fourth Paper relates to an improvement of the German organ, or street organ, a popular instrument which seems to have been improved shortly after by a Parisian constructor, on the lines suggested by Diderot. In England, the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1749 (pp. 339, 405, 495) greatly commended Diderot's Second and Fourth Dissertations, and called the attention of specialists to his plan for a new organ. The Fifth Memoir, on the resistance of the air to the motion of pendulums,

demonstrates that this retardation is like the squares of the arcs described, against Newton's contention that it was like the arcs. Diderot concludes by inviting experiment in this matter: "I have," he says, "for Newton all the deference that we owe to men unique in their kind; I am much inclined to believe that the truth is on his side; yet it is right to make this sure."

A difficulty raised against the explanation of cohesion in bodies by the principle of attraction suggested another paper by Diderot which was inserted in the *Mémoires de Trévoux*, for April, 1761. Here he attempted to defend the extension of the Newtonian principle from the motions of celestial bodies and of falling bodies to several other natural facts related to cohesion.

In the same year, 1761, he had occasion to write two papers, in answer to D'Alembert, whose *Opuscles Mathématiques* had just appeared. One of Diderot's papers discussed the calculation of probabilities; the other was devoted to a very interesting application of that kind of calculation to a question which, in some quarters, is still open to-day: it was concerning the advisability of inoculation, or vaccination.

D'Alembert had given statistics that were not favorable to vaccination. Diderot criticized his friend's figures, and vigorously defended a practice which, however dangerous it proved in some individual cases (easily exaggerated at a time when vaccination was an English novelty), he considered indispensable to prevent or to check the ravages of small-pox in a community. According to him, it was only through a selfish, narrow application of the calculation of probabilities that the individual chances of death from small-pox were balanced against those of death by inoculation: a higher reason for the general practice of vaccination lay in the dangers of contagion and large mortality which had been made but too manifest in the past.

The interest which Diderot had shown for questions of acoustics again appeared later in his life, when he practically composed, under the name of the German Bemetzrieder, who taught Mlle Diderot music, a method for teaching the clavecin, or harpsichord, and the elements of harmony. The notes on music, which he had collected since the early days when he associated with composers like Rameau, J.-J.



Rousseau, Grétry, and enlightened amateurs like Grimm, he handed to Charles Burney<sup>10</sup> for his work on the state of music in France and Italy.

It was about the year 1750, when he had set about the enormous task of the *Encyclopédie*, that the scientific activity of Diderot displayed itself in the widest and the most varied fields. The influence of Bacon was at that time very powerful over the minds of the two editors of the *Encyclopédie*, when they planned to give a full account of the contemporary state of all the branches of human knowledge. This period seems to have marked a decline in Diderot's interest in pure mathematics (which D'Alembert thought a matter for regret) and a corresponding increase in his chemical and biological studies. He attended the courses which Rouelle gave in chemistry, where he had Rousseau, and probably Lavoisier, as fellow-students; Locke's maxim, *Nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu*, was conspicuously displayed on the walls of Rouelle's laboratory.<sup>11</sup> Those lec-

<sup>10</sup> *Corresp. littér.*, Tournoux ed., I, p. 313, n.

<sup>11</sup> Ch. Adam, *op. cit.*, p. 357.—On Rouelle (l'Aîné), who is to be counted among the founders of chemistry,

tures on chemistry have been preserved from the notes taken by Diderot in 1754–1755, put in order and written out by him in 1756, and revised in 1757 and 1758.<sup>12</sup> He also attended courses in physiology and medicine, trying to be present at important operations, and variously improving his knowledge by reading medical works and conversing with doctors, of whose society he was especially fond. He was well known as the learned translator of that huge encyclopedia of medical lore, James's *Medicinal Dictionary*. He must have early begun that large collection of facts, confirming his theories on the origin of life and the variation of species, which has been preserved, in a somewhat undigested shape, under the title of *Elements of Physiology*.

From that variety of studies, and his familiarity with Bacon's works, resulted the composition of his *Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature* (1754), a work which is Baconian not only in its title, borrowed from several of Bacon's works

see the Notice of Diderot (VI, 405–410); also Ferd. Hoefer, *Histoire de la chimie*, II, 386.

<sup>12</sup> *Revue Scientifique*, July 26, 1884.

which bear it,<sup>18</sup> but in its general inspiration. It is, in fact, a series of aphorisms, more or less developed, mingled with scientific "conjectures," some of which have been justified by later experiments.

The influence of Bacon on Diderot seems as direct, although not as often traceable through literal transcriptions, as that of Shaftesbury. The *Pensées philosophiques* were to a large extent quotations from Shaftesbury; the *Pensées sur l'interprétation de la nature* are rather the notes and jottings of a scientist reading the works of Bacon. Diderot's *Prospectus* of the *Encyclopédie*, which we shall consider in the next chapter, affords clear evidence of an avowed discipleship; the *Pensées sur l'interprétation de la nature* are Baconian in a more independent manner. They embody the spirit of Bacon's experimental method, proclaim anew the message of the Great Instauration, in a somewhat modernized and disconnected fashion, and are

<sup>18</sup> The *Cogitata et Visa de interpretatione naturæ, sive de scientia operativa*, not included in Blackbourne's edition of Bacon's *Opera Omnia* in 1730; the very similar first book of the *Novum Organum*, entitled *Aphorismi de Interpretatione Naturæ et Regno Hominis*.

illustrated by "anticipations" or hypotheses in certain fields of science which in Bacon's age were almost or altogether unexplored.

Diderot begins by advocating a closer alliance between ingenious and patient men, men with ideas and men with instruments, to "unite and direct all their efforts at once against the resistance of nature."<sup>14</sup> He then proclaims the necessary decline of pure mathematics in the near future, because they are useful only in conjunction with experiment, and are nothing, taken in themselves, but "a kind of general metaphysics, in which bodies are divested of their individual qualities."<sup>15</sup> As for the phenomena of nature,

<sup>14</sup> (We quote from the edition of the *Works of Francis Bacon* by J. Spedding, R. L. Ellis, and D. D. Heath, Boston, 1861, 15 vols.)—Bacon, *Nov. Org.*, Pref., wishes to have two "tribes" or "families of contemplators or philosophers," not hostile, "but rather allied and united by mutual assistance," the one practising a method called "the anticipation of the mind," the other "the interpretation of nature." He often dwells on the usefulness of efforts proceeding from the most various minds (Sped., I, 237).

<sup>15</sup> Bacon, *De Augmentis*, (Sped., II, 305): "Nescio . . . quo fato fiat ut Mathematica et Logica, quæ ancillarum loco erga Physicam se gerere debent, nihilominus certitudinem suam præ ea jactantes, dominatum contra exercere præsumant." He elsewhere claims that optics

which are more properly the objects of true science, their infinite multitude and astounding variety and the confusion introduced by the terms used to designate them might well discourage men; but "usefulness circumscribes everything," and will set limits to the sciences of nature, the most useful of all, as it has done to mathematics.<sup>16</sup> Notions which have no foundation in experience, that is, in the outside world, are nothing but "opinions"; they are comparable to those Northern forests in which the trees have no roots and are felled by a blast of wind. The investigation of truth must be made through the senses and reflection: man and astronomy belong to physics more properly than to mathematics, by which they have been invaded.

In the *Advancement of Learning*, Bk II (Sped., VI, 225): "There remaineth yet another part of Natural Philosophy, which is commonly made a principal part, and holdeth rank with Physic special and Metaphysic; which is Mathematic; but I think it more agreeable to the nature of things, and to the light of order, to place it as a branch of Metaphysic. . . ."

<sup>16</sup> For the utilitarian standpoint in science, see Bacon, *De Augmentis*, Bk V, c. 2; *Nov. Org.*, I, Aphor. 73; and *Cogitata et Visa*.—The apparent hopelessness of the task confronting natural philosophers is also a familiar topic throughout Bacon's works: *Nov. Org.*, I, Aphor. 118, etc.

must incessantly go in and out of himself, as the bee does to collect honey in its hive.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, it is much easier to consult one's own mind than nature; hence so many systems. The systematic philosopher often perceives truth, as the unskilled politician sees opportunity, from the bald side, and asserts that it cannot be grasped, while the experimental worker seizes it through chance by the forelock.<sup>18</sup> Great men have not been lacking, yet the amount of true knowledge is very scanty, because they have given too much attention to the abstract sciences,<sup>19</sup> and words have been multiplied instead of things. "The true way of philosophizing should have been and should

<sup>17</sup> Similarly Bacon, *Nov. Org.*, I, Aphor. 95, compares the empirics to ants, the dogmatical to spiders, while the true labor of philosophy resembles that of the bee, which "extracts matter from the flowers of the garden and the field, but works and fashions it by its own efforts."

<sup>18</sup> Bacon, *Phænomena Universi*, Pref. (Sped., VII, 232): "... Naturam, ut fortunam, a fronte capillatam, ab occipito calvam esse." Also *Nov. Org.*, I, Aphor. 121.

<sup>19</sup> *Nov. Org.*, I, Aphor. 79-80.—"... Nemo expectet magnum progressum in scientiis (præsertim in parte earum operativa), nisi Philosophia Naturalis ad scientias particulares producta fuerit, et scientiæ particulares rursus ad Naturalem Philosophiam reductæ" (Sped., I, 286).

be to apply the understanding to the understanding; the understanding and experiment, to the senses; the senses, to nature; nature, to the investigation of instruments; instruments, to the research and improvement of arts, which would be thrown to the common people to teach them to respect philosophy." The standard of usefulness is the only one which the vulgar knows. It is unfortunate that rational or systematic philosophy should have spent so much ingenuity in connecting facts, instead of collecting them; for facts, of whatever nature, are the philosopher's true wealth. Useful discoveries are often reached in experimental physics, as it were by chance,<sup>20</sup> while the investigator is looking for other results; as the ploughman's sons in the fable reaped an unexpected harvest, or discovered a mine of lead, while they had been digging for hidden gold.<sup>21</sup> The experimental philosopher, through long practice, acquires an in-

<sup>20</sup> Bacon, *Of the Advanc. of Learning*, Bk II (Sped., VI, 261-262).

<sup>21</sup> This illustration is applied by Bacon to the researches of the Chemists, who, while looking for gold, had incidentally made some very useful discoveries (*Cogitata et Visa*, Sped., VII, 121; *De Augmentis*, lib. I, Sped., II, 134).

instinct or scent for discovering truth, comparable to Socrates' "familiar demon"; it were useful to reduce that instinct into clear notions, so as to impart it to other men. Nothing can be more opposed to the true spirit of scientific research than an affectation of power or mystery, that "affectation of great masters" illustrated by Newton and Stahl, which often robs them of the credit of their discoveries, and tends to make philosophy unpopular. Read Franklin's *Observations and Experiments on Electricity*, to learn how experiments may be varied; make tables of the qualities of matter, and apply them to the subject of your investigation; practice the "inversion" of experiment,<sup>22</sup> and be not fondly attached to any system from which you may have started. Vary the objects of your experiments; complicate, combine them in every possible manner. Some phenomena may be quite near us, by which in the future physics will reduce gravity, elasticity, attraction, magnetism, electricity, all to one principle. Enlightening facts are often found in those which appear deceptive,

<sup>22</sup> On the formation of "tables," see *Nov. Org.*, II, Aphor. 10 sqq.—The "inversion," in *De Augmentis Sc.*, Lib. V, cap. 2 (Sped., II, 380).



or in contradiction with our system. Experiment must be free; it must not be distorted, and made to lie, by showing only examples that prove, and excluding others that disprove, our idea.<sup>23</sup> We must not shape things according to our notions, but reform our notions according to things. Methods are not to be trusted utterly; for by following the wrong road persistently, a man loses his way more and more.<sup>24</sup> Instruments and measures, used as auxiliaries to the senses, may be as misleading as they; experiment will serve to test them, and then will safely borrow their help. Obstacles are to be met not only in nature, but in men; for every age

<sup>23</sup> Aristotle is charged with this abuse of experiment in *Nov. Org.*, I, Aphor. 63: “. . . Experientiam ad sua placita tortam circumducit et captivam;”—and in the *Redargutio Philosophiarum* (Sped., VII, 91): “Illi (Aristoteli) enim mos erat non liberam experientiam consulere, sed captivam ostentare; nec eam ad veritatis inquisitionem promiscuam et aequam, sed ad dictorum suorum fidem sollicitatam et electam adducere.”

<sup>24</sup> In Bacon, *Advanc. of Learning*, Bk I (Sped., VI, 131), there is only a caution against the error of an “over-early and peremptory reduction of knowledge into arts and methods.” It seems as though here Diderot had had in view the Cartesian principle of abiding by the method once chosen, even if it is bad, in order eventually to come out of error.

abounds in systematics and divines<sup>25</sup> who, in their constant opposition to the natural philosopher, are comparable to those ephemeral insects who must needs disturb man in his work and his rest. The chain of causes and effects is infinite, and we must stop in our conjectures where we are on the point of transcending nature. Final causes are bad for the interpretation of nature,<sup>26</sup> even in natural theology: for they amount to a substitution of man's conjecture to the work of God. The physicist should not concern himself with the "Why," but only try and explain the "How";<sup>27</sup> the latter being derived from things, the former from our understanding only. Common prejudices and axioms are snares to our precipitation: the "Nihil sub sole novum," for instance, is little else than an absurdity; the philosopher must severely criticize the so-called popular wisdom.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Bacon, *Nov. Org.*, I, Aphor. 89, and *Cogitata et Visa* (Sped., VII, 108); also *Filum Labyrinthi sive Formula Inquisitionis* (Sped., VI, 421).

<sup>26</sup> *De Augmentis Sc.*, Lib. III, cap. 4 (Sped., II, 294), and *Nov. Org.*, II, Aphor. 2: "Causa Finalis tantum abest ut prosit, ut etiam scientias corrumpat. . . ."

<sup>27</sup> *Nov. Org.*, I, Aphor. 66.

<sup>28</sup> This is probably a suggested addition to Bacon's

The foregoing analysis may suffice to show how thoroughly imbued Diderot was with the philosophy of Bacon, when he wrote the *Pensées sur l'interprétation de la nature*. The opening apostrophe of the book: "Young man, take this, and read . . .," which puzzled and amused Diderot's contemporaries, is but a reminiscence of Bacon's favorite form of address "Ad Filios"; and we are inclined to think that the Prayer which was inserted at the end of some copies of the *Pensées*, is likewise in imitation of the author of the Great Instauration. The scientific illustrations given in conjunction with Diderot's aphorisms are mainly derived from studies in electricity, then much in vogue. We have seen how Diderot held up to his countrymen Franklin's book on electricity, just translated by the Abbé d'Alibard (1752), as a model of scientific investigation. It is very much to be regretted that Diderot did not develop his ideas concerning electricity at least as much as he had done his notions concerning some subjects in geometry and acoustics. Had he de- well known criticism of the "Idols," or common human errors (*Nov. Org.*, I, Aphor. 39 sqq.); it comes directly from *De Augm.*, lib. I (Sped., II, 166).

voted several papers, instead of only a few illuminating paragraphs of his *Interprétation de la nature*, to the then new problems of electricity, had he above all had the means and leisure of contriving experiments in that field, he might have conclusively shown, before Ørsted and Ampère, that electricity and magnetism were identical in nature, and that many unexplained phenomena, enumerated in his Second, Third, and Fourth Conjectures, could be reduced to the newly discovered principle. He thought that the constitution and the motion of the earth might account for the direction of the magnetic needle, the Northern lights, and many other natural facts: "These notions," he added, "may be received or controverted, because they have as yet no reality except in my understanding. Experiments must substantiate them; the physicist must imagine experiments that will separate the phenomena and completely identify them" (II, 28). It is unfortunate perhaps that, like his master Bacon, he suggested more for others to do than he attempted himself to achieve. Yet raising doubts and making scientific hypotheses was more commendable than

dogmatizing: "I throw my ideas on paper, and they become what they may" (I, 406).

Diderot could apparently not be a specialist in science any more than in philosophy, because his mind was, from the first, essentially encyclopedic. Being interested in everything, he could not devote his life to any one particular pursuit, be it ethics, or chemistry, or physiology, or the arts and crafts, or mathematics, or literature. In his age, and with his singular capacity for every kind of work, the one work for which he was fitted, and which he successfully carried out, was the production of an Encyclopedia, the first of the bulky encyclopedias of modern times, for the propagation of practical knowledge and the promotion of useful ideas.

Hence his strong disapproval of anything that tended to obscure human knowledge, or keep it under the bushel, for whatever purpose. It has been seen that he blamed Newton and Stahl for what he called the "affectation of great masters": the former having held back his discovery of differential calculus until Leibnitz in his turn had discovered it and claimed the credit of it for himself; the latter

having invested valuable chemical theories with the obscurity of language and affected mystery of alchemy. Are not the veils of nature thick enough for our eyes, that the most enlightened men should further wrap in darkness the truth which they chance to discover? When the invention, besides, is immediately beneficial to mankind, like that alleged cure for a disease reputed incurable, by a certain Dr Keyser, which was then much discussed, or the discovery of a secret of ancient painters for painting with wax, our encyclopedist shunned all considerations regarding a legitimate profit for the inventors, fought to get possession of the secret, and hastened to publish it. Keyser's secret he does not seem to have found; but on the question of wax-painting he cheerfully entered the lists against the antiquarian Comte de Caylus, and published the results attained in the same field by a young painter, his friend, named Bachelier. Of any scientific discovery he might have said, as he said of esthetic pleasures: "Any pleasure that is for me alone moves me but little, and is of short duration. . . . It is for my friends as well as for myself that I

read, reflect, write, meditate, hear, see, and feel" (XI, 115). All truth, as he thought with Bacon, was to be imparted to mankind; the inventor must think of the community rather than of himself, his interests, and his glory: hiding useful discoveries is little short of criminal. "We invite all artisans," he said in the *Encyclopédie*, "to take advice from the scientists, and not to allow the discoveries that they will make to die with them. Let them be aware that to hide a useful secret is to be guilty of theft towards society; and that, in such cases, it is as base to put the interest of one man above the interest of all, as in a hundred other cases concerning which they themselves would not hesitate to decide" (XIII, 371).

Diderot's scientific activity, as we have remarked before, was not confined to facts, observations, experiments, that is, to borrow Bacon's term, to "works." He was truly great in daring to soar above the contemporary state of science, and boldly framing a hypothetical theory of the universe. In this he certainly went beyond the precepts of Bacon and the practice of English

Baconians. Yet his hypothesis, which to himself appeared as a rather wild venture, was truly of a scientific, not metaphysical, order; for the next century brought little that could invalidate, and much that confirmed it. He only ceased to be a Baconian, so to speak, where he began to be a Darwinian *avant la lettre*.

Had Saunderson really seen on his deathbed his wonderful vision of the first stages of the world, as recorded by the mythical Inchliff, he would to-day be quoted among the forerunners of Evolutionism. As it is, the works that attracted Diderot's attention to the question of the origin of animate and inanimate nature were those of his French contemporaries, De Maillet, Bonnet, Robinet, Buffon to some extent, but above all Maupertuis.<sup>29</sup> As early as 1749, Diderot had conceived the idea that the universe might not have been for all time past in its present order, but that it must have undergone an infinite series of transformations before reaching its present state; and that, as far as life is concerned, nature had probably produced

<sup>29</sup> Marcel Landrieu, *Lamarck et ses précurseurs*, in *Revue anthropologique*, 1906 (vol. XVI), pp. 152-169.



an immense number of forms, monsters or "sports," not fitted to endure, as well as those other kinds which had survived because they had proved able to "subsist by their own means and perpetuate themselves." In 1754, he faced the same problem again, while discussing a dissertation by Maupertuis; and he was then led, in one of the most illuminating pages of the *Pensées sur l'interprétation de la nature*, clearly to express the great philosophic doubt which in his days it was prudent to express with some reserves, in the form of a "question" or a "conjecture":

"Just as in the animal and vegetable kingdoms, an individual begins, increases, endures, decays, and passes away, might it not be the same for species as a whole? Were we not taught by our faith that the animals came out of the Creator's hands such as we see them, and were it allowed to entertain the least uncertainty about their beginning and their end, might not the philosopher, left to his conjectures, suspect that animality had its particular elements, from all eternity, scattered and mixed in the mass of matter; that those elements happened to meet, because it was possible that it should happen; that the embryo formed from those elements passed through an infinite number of organizations and develop-

ments; that by succession it acquired motion, sensations, ideas, thought, reflection, consciousness, sentiments, passions, signs, gestures, sounds, articulate sounds, a language, laws, sciences and arts; that millions of years elapsed between each of these developments; that it may perhaps still have other developments to undergo, other increases to receive, which are unknown to us; that it has had or will have a stationary state; that it is receding or will recede from that state through an everlasting decay, during which its faculties will go out of it as they had come; that it will disappear from nature for ever, or rather that it will continue to exist in nature, but in a form and with faculties very different from those that are perceived in it at this instant of duration? Religion saves us many wanderings and a great deal of work!" (II, 57-58).

Between 1754 and 1759, that is, roughly, while his labors as editor of the *Encyclopédie* took up most of his time, Diderot did not give any further developments to his favorite theory of the evolution of life; but he meditated about it a great deal: he gradually discarded the notion of a common prototype or "embryo" of all living forms, constituted by eternal particles of animate matter, and paid more attention to

the criticism of the accepted definitions of matter and life, inanimate and animate nature. To his profound view, that the order of the universe was not absolute, but relative, not immutably fixed, but forever changing, he then added this important hypothesis, that everything in nature is in a perpetual process of transformation, through forces inherent in matter. The artificial character of all the fixed distinctions commonly established by scientists and philosophers between inertia, motion, life, consciousness, he tried to demonstrate in his *Philosophic Principles on Matter and Motion* (1770), and in that medley of madness and deep thinking, as he called it, entitled *D'Alembert's Dream* (written in 1769, published in 1830). In this fully developed form, his transformistic theories constitute a rather crude, but exceedingly original system, far more interesting and fruitful than the cut and dried materialism of his friends Helvétius and Holbach. The scientific miscellanies collected under the title of *Elements of Physiology*, and first published in the Assézat-Tourneux edition, may in part represent the Baconian "tables" of facts on which the system rests.

Can matter be conceived as eternally and essentially invested with motion? Can matter and motion spontaneously generate life? Can the living molecules of primitive chaos have given rise to all the forms of life, vegetal and animal, from the lowest to the most highly organized?—All these questions Diderot answered in the affirmative in 1769 and 1770.

His *Philosophic Principles on Matter and Motion*, one of his most original contributions to the philosophy of science, may be considered as the outcome of his long study of natural philosophy under Rouelle and other masters, and of his discussions with D'Alembert and Holbach. Matter, he thought, never is at rest. The state of rest is nothing but an abstraction. All bodies gravitate, and all the particles of bodies gravitate; bodies therefore are full of latent energies. "The molecule, endowed with a quality proper to its nature, is by itself an active force" (II, 65). The assertion that matter is essentially inert is "a tremendous mistake, contrary to all sound physics and chemistry." No outside force is needed to set matter in motion; for matter, being hetero-

geneous in its nature, has in itself the principle of motion, it is eternally *in nisu*. The capital error of philosophers has been to imagine matter as homogeneous, inert, indifferent to motion and rest. The universe conceived by science shall be a closed system of forces. "The supposition of any being whatever, placed outside of the material universe, is impossible. One should never make such suppositions, because nothing can be inferred from them" (II, 69).

As for the passage from matter to life: Diderot solved it by denying that there was any irreducible difference, any impassable gulf between them. In his age, and for a long time after, it appeared legitimate to think that what is called organic matter, and even rudimentary living forms, might be created, under proper conditions, through spontaneous generation. The experiments of Needham on that subject had attracted a great deal of attention: in examining the fermentation of yeast in the microscope, he had discovered numberless moving bodies which he had taken to be micro-organisms spontaneously generated from the flour. Voltaire had made great fun of Needham and his

microscopic "eels"; but Diderot did not think them so ridiculous after all (II, 131). Needham later on had felt uneasy when he had been charged with undermining the belief in the Biblical account of creation, and, says Diderot, had turned theologian "in self-defence" (IX, 437). Torn between science and the Bible, rationalism and faith, he had, like many men before and after him, done his best to keep one foot ashore while he put the other in the boat.<sup>30</sup>

The French philosopher had no inclination to spare beliefs which he no longer shared, and, besides, he was not writing for the press: hence arose his altogether un-English boldness in his speculations on animate and inanimate matter. From Needham's experiments, and others of a similar nature by Beccari, Kessel and Mayer, Rouelle, Macquer, on vegetable fibrine, from observations on the *Muscipula Dionæa*, on antherozoids, zoophytes, and various modes of animal and vegetable life, he concluded that the boundaries between the mineral, vegetable, and animal "reigns" of nature were not at all fixed and

<sup>30</sup> Max Müller, quoted in E. Caro, *Problèmes de morale sociale*, p. 272.

immutable.<sup>31</sup> Many very familiar facts, as the phenomenon of the assimilation of food, that is, the transformation of inanimate into animate matter, sufficiently prove, according to him, that a divergence between the properties of two forms of matter has been exaggerated into a fundamental difference. Life cannot be conceived as a kind of mysterious entity which, in certain given conditions, invests matter. Diderot in 1759 strove to prove to Hoop and the Holbach family that, if the particles of matter are conceived as dead and inert, no change of their position in relation to animate, sentient particles can possibly make them live. "Sentiment and life therefore are eternal. What lives has always lived, and shall live without end. The only difference I know between death and life is, that you now live in a mass, and that dissolved, scattered in molecules, you will live in detail twenty years hence" (XVIII, 407).

<sup>31</sup> For a criticism of the endeavors to prove spontaneous generation, from Needham to Pouchet, and a statement of the problem of life in its modern form, see Prof. E. A. Schäfer, *The Nature, Origin and Maintenance of Life* (Inaugural Address of the President of the British Association for the Advancement of Science), 1912.

On another occasion, in 1769, after he had defended this same "paradox" of the eternity and the ubiquity of life and sentiment against his friend D'Alembert, he wrote down the *Conversation between D'Alembert and Diderot*, and imagined a *Dream* of his friend as a sequel or result of the conversation. D'Alembert talks in his sleep, imagining that he is still engaged in his discussion with "le philosophe"; Mlle de Lespinasse and Dr Bordeu watch over him, the former much puzzled by his incoherent talk, while the latter is extremely interested:

"All beings circulate in one another, consequently all species. . . . Everything is in perpetual flow. . . . Every animal is more or less man; every mineral is more or less plant; every plant is more or less animal. There is nothing definite in nature. . . . And you talk of individuals, poor philosophers! Leave your individuals; answer me. Is there one atom in nature absolutely like another atom? . . . No. . . . Do you not acknowledge that everything holds together in nature, and that it is impossible that there should be a gap in the chain? What do you mean then with your individuals? There are none, no, there are none. . . . There is nothing but one great individual, that is the whole. In that whole, as in a machine, as in



any animal, there is a part which you will call such or such; but when you give the name of individual to that part of the whole, it is through as false a concept as if, in a bird, you called the wing, or a quill on that wing, an individual. . . . And you talk of essences, poor philosophers! Leave your essences. Consider the general mass, and if your imagination is too narrow to compass it, consider your first origin and ultimate end. . . . O Architas! you who measured the globe, what are you? A handful of dust. . . . What is a being? . . . The sum of a certain number of tendencies. . . . Can I be anything else but a tendency? . . . No, I am going towards a goal. . . . And the species? . . . Species are nothing but tendencies to a certain common goal of their own. . . . And life? Life is a succession of actions and reactions. . . . Living, I act and react *en masse*. . . . Dead, I act and react in molecules. . . . Then I do not die? . . . No, certainly, I do not die in that sense, either I, or anything that is. . . . To be born, to live, and to pass away, are changes of form. . . . And what matters one form or another? Each form has the happiness and unhappiness that are its own. From the elephant to the gnat, . . . from the gnat to the sentient living molecule, the origin of all, there is not a point in the whole of nature that does not suffer or enjoy" (II, 138-140).

Before this monistic system, in which the living cell was the origin and the composing

element of all living forms, and life was admitted as existing, at least potentially, in all matter, the Cartesian theory of animal mechanism crumbled to pieces (II, 115); the identity of man's self was found to be based on memory alone, since his physical and psychological frame was in a state of constant transformation; determinism reigned, and with moral liberty the notion of responsibility disappeared, so that a reform of the foundations of ethics became necessary.<sup>32</sup> In other words, man ceased to be an exception in the universe; he was wholly reintegrated into the realm and under the laws of nature. He was shown to be merely a lucky

<sup>32</sup> The *Lettre d'envoi* (IX, 252), subjoined to a lost version of the *Dream*, makes a few distinctions which unphilosophic minds are too prone to forget: Diderot beseeches his correspondent "not to judge him without meditation, not to make any extract from this shapeless and dangerous production, the publication of which would irretrievably destroy the author's rest, fortune, life, honor, or the just opinion that is entertained of his morals": "Remember the difference between illicit and criminal ethics; do not forget that the honest man does nothing criminal, and the good citizen nothing illicit; that there is a speculative doctrine which is not for the multitude, nor for practice; and that if, without being false, we do not write all that we do, so without being inconsistent we do not do all we write."

survivor, or rather a cunning, successful conqueror, in the great struggle that had begun since living forms had originated out of chaos.

After listening for some time to the apparently incoherent Dream, Dr Bordeu remarks: "He has made a rather fine excursion. This is very high philosophy: systematic for the present, but I believe that the more man advances in knowledge, the more this will be confirmed" (II, 140). It is indeed astonishing to find with what well-grounded confidence Diderot awaited the verdict of later ages: "I feel rightly, and I judge rightly," he wrote to Grimm, "and time in the end always follows my taste and my opinion. Do not laugh: it is I who anticipate the future and know its thought" (Dec. 3, 1765; XVIII, 475).

He knew that, before his anticipations could be verified, and cease to be mere "opinions," much work had to be accomplished in botany, comparative anatomy, and geology. In the opening pages of his *Elements of Physiology*, he vaguely outlined some of the directions of future researches:

*"Beings.*—One must begin by classifying beings, from the inert molecule, if there is any, to the living molecule, the microscopic animal, the animal-plant, the animal, man.

*"Chain of beings.*—One should not believe that the chain of beings is interrupted by the diversity of forms; often the form is nothing but a deceiving mask, and the link which seems to be missing may exist in some known being, the true place of which has not yet been assigned by the progress of comparative anatomy. This way of classifying beings is very laborious and slow, and can only be the fruit of successive labors by a large number of naturalists. Let us wait, and not hasten to judge.

*"Contradictory beings.*—They are those the organization of which does not agree with the rest of the universe. Blind Nature, which creates them, exterminates them; it only allows those to subsist which are able to coexist supportably with the general order celebrated by its panegyrists" (IX, 253).

How this elimination took place was the great question; Diderot between 1770 and 1780 gave the same general principle as in 1749: the survival of the fittest, through the adaptation of the organisms to the needs of beings (IX, 264).

It should not be hastily surmised, however, that Diderot was a direct forerunner of Dar-

win. In the long succession of speculative thinkers and scientists who prepared the coming of Evolution,<sup>33</sup> he occupies an honorable place; he deserves credit for having anticipated in a striking manner the formulas of natural science in the nineteenth century; and, while this credit should not be minimized, care should be taken also that it be not exaggerated. Under the direct influence of the works of some contemporaries,<sup>34</sup> as well as that of Lucretius and the Greek Atomists, he for over thirty years indefatigably debated, within himself and with his friends, several ideas that attracted him because they seemed to have some potential scientific value: the Empedoclean and Lucretian theory of the survival of the fittest, the eternity of organic molecules, the Lockian hypothesis of

<sup>33</sup> J. W. Judd, *The Coming of Evolution*, Cambridge University Press, 1910;—H. F. Osborn, *From the Greeks to Darwin*, N. Y., 1894.

<sup>34</sup> All published in the period immediately preceding the composition of *D'Alembert's Dream*: Bonnet, *Contemplations de la Nature*, 1764, and *Palingénésie philosophique ou idées sur l'état passé et l'état présent des êtres vivants*, 1768;—Robinet, *De la Nature*, 1766, and *Considérations philosophiques sur la gradation naturelle des formes de l'être*, 1768;—lastly, Buffon's transformistic phase may be limited between 1761 and 1766.

sentient matter, spontaneous generation, the Leibnitzian law of continuity, the reactions of functions on organs; in the end he evolved a transformistic theory clearer than any to be found in Maupertuis and Buffon, a system of plausible hypotheses which, although still intricate and sometimes self-contradictory, was at least more positive and more exempt from ludicrous features than the cosmological fancies of Bonnet and De Maillet.

It has been claimed that, for chronological reasons, this lucid expression of transformism by Diderot had been absolutely uninfluential on Lamarck.<sup>35</sup> But enough has been said to show that, in the latter part of the eighteenth century, transformism as a general theory of life had become identified with the thought of the Encyclopedic school. The agitation created by Diderot and his circle around that theory must have largely contributed to awaken the attention of Goethe in Germany, Erasmus Darwin in England, and Lamarck in France, to the necessity of throwing more positive light on that great

<sup>35</sup> M. Landrieu, *Lamarck, fondateur du transformisme*, Paris, 1909.

issue.<sup>36</sup> Transformism only needed the partial scientific confirmation which Lamarck and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire gave it in the first two decades of the nineteenth century to pass from the realm of systematic philosophy into that of scientific controversy. Lamarck, who was for some time the *protégé* of Buffon, and in 1785 became a contributor to the *Encyclopédie mé-*

\* Ch. Darwin, in the *Historical Sketch* prefixed in 1866 to *The Origin of Species*, notes the curious manner in which similar ideas concerning the origin of species occurred to Goethe, E. Darwin, and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire in 1794-1795.—Ch. Darwin had at first resented comparisons between his work and that of Lamarck (see his correspondence with Lyell); but in 1866 he wrote in his *Sketch* (p. xiv): "Lamarck was the first man whose conclusions on the subject excited much attention. This justly-celebrated naturalist first published his views in 1801; he much enlarged them in 1809 in his *Philosophie Zoologique*, and subsequently, in 1815, in the Introduction to his *Histoire Naturelle des Animaux sans Vertèbres*. In these works he upholds the doctrine that all species, including man, are descended from other species. He first did the eminent service of arousing attention to the probability of all change in the organic, as well as in the inorganic world, being the result of law, and not of miraculous interposition." It may be said, without in any way detracting from Lamarck's credit for having first scientifically formulated transformism, that the movement had been prepared for at least half a century by the Encyclopedists.

*thodique*, edited by Naigeon and other friends of Diderot, eventually founded transformism when he subjected it to definite laws.

Thus, in natural science, Diderot was not so much a disciple of English thought as a distant and very indirect forerunner of the most momentous revolution accomplished in science and philosophy in the nineteenth century by Lamarck and Darwin. The idea by which he anticipated one of Lamarck's laws, the modification of organs according to the particular activities of individuals, was a theme to which he often reverted in esthetic criticism, and which we shall have occasion again to consider: he called it the "metaphysics of drawing" (X, 307).

Diderot as a scientist achieved little, and foreshadowed a great deal. Had he been a specialist, had he known how to confine himself to mathematics, or chemistry, or natural science, he might have rivalled D'Alembert, or Lavoisier, or Buffon. But scientific achievements, as well as genius itself, are the fruits, as Buffon said, of "long patience"; and Diderot's philosophic mind was essentially impatient. It always carried him, against Bacon's precept, above the



forest of particulars into the sky of generalities; he had more of the "proud architect" in him than of the "patient artisan." Still, in this very incapacity substantially to increase positive knowledge, in this instinct of the directions which scientific investigation was to follow in after times, he was not unlike Francis Bacon. With a sincere contempt for unfounded conjectures and systems in science, and a strong belief that only through a patient study of concrete reality can human knowledge be increased, both worked to destroy philosophic systems prevailing in their age, and at the same time began to frame the more positive systems that were to supersede them.

## CHAPTER V

### THE ENCYCLOPEDIST

FRANCIS BACON, in a short work entitled *Valerius Terminus of the Interpretation of Nature*, had cautioned natural philosophers against the danger of excessive specialization: ". . . In particular sciences we see that if men fall to subdivide their labours, as to be an oculist in physic, or to be perfect in some one title of the law, or the like, they may prove ready and subtile, but not deep or sufficient, no, not in that subject which they do particularly attend, because of that consent which it hath with the rest. And it is a matter of common discourse of the chain of sciences how they are linked together, insomuch as the Grecians, who had terms at will, have fitted it of a name of *Circle-Learning*" (Sped., VI, 43).—This Circle-Learning, or Encyclopedic knowledge, was to become more and more necessary in the modern age, when specialization, with all the evils attending on it, has become a general and unavoid-

able practice, while the interest in natural philosophy, or science, has ceased to be the privilege of a few. As it is no longer possible to claim a knowledge *de omni re scibili*, like the famous Pico della Mirandola, or Cicero's ideal orator, works of general reference have steadily been increased and multiplied.

Of course there had been no dearth of encyclopedic works or sums of human knowledge since Aristotle, especially in the thirteenth century, "the century of books bearing the significant titles of *Summa*, or *Universitas*, or *Speculum*."<sup>1</sup> In the age of the Renaissance, a book bearing for the first time the title of *Cyclopædia* had been published at Basel by Ringelberg in 1541; several others had followed, until Alstedius published his Latin *Encyclopædia scientiarum omnium* (1630) shortly after Bacon's death. Works of this kind, brought up to date so as to include the latest results of scientific researches,

<sup>1</sup> John Morley, *Diderot and the Encyclopædists*, vol. I, p. 119. We are much indebted to this author's excellent review of the encyclopedic idea before the eighteenth century, as well as to H. Hallam, *Introduction to the Literature of Europe* (vol. IV), and to the article "Encyclopædia," in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th edition.

became more necessary than ever towards the end of the seventeenth century, when the accessions to human knowledge since Bacon and Alsted had been very considerable. The task, though greater, had then become easier. The acquisitions of the past were to be found in the early encyclopedias which had broken the ground; as for the later observations and discoveries, they were to be collected from a large number of learned periodical publications, which had their rise in Western Europe in the latter half of the seventeenth century.

For instance, the Academy of Sciences of Paris, established in 1666, had by 1700 published ten volumes of *Memoirs*, mostly on mathematical subjects. The English Royal Society, which may be said to have arisen as early as 1645,<sup>2</sup> and which was incorporated in 1662, had begun on March 1, 1665, the publication of its *Philosophical Transactions*, in which observations and experiments held a large place. The progress of knowledge was further advanced by the first scientific reviews: the *Journal des Savants*, begun in 1665 by Denis de Sallo, of

<sup>2</sup> H. Hallam, *op. cit.*, vol. IV, p. 562.

the Parliament of Paris, and continued by Gallois; the *Giornale de' Litterati* (Rome, 1668), and the *Giornale Veneto de' Litterati* (Venice, 1671); the *Leipzig Acts*, begun in 1682; while many periodicals of general as well as scientific interest sprang up in the Netherlands, especially after the immigration into that country of a large number of learned French Protestants: the *Mercure Savant* (Amsterdam, 1684) was intended to supplement or to rival Visé's more literary *Mercure Galant*, but quickly met a successful competitor in Bayle's *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres* (Amsterdam, 1684); Le Clerc, in Amsterdam, shortly after began to issue a series of learned periodicals, the *Bibliothèque Universelle et Historique* from 1686 to 1693, the *Bibliothèque Choisie* from 1703 to 1713, and the *Bibliothèque ancienne et moderne* from 1714 to 1727. Lastly, in this period vast compilations appeared which aimed at embodying information of an encyclopedic nature from all these various periodical papers and transactions: Moréri wrote his *Grand Dictionnaire historique* as early as 1674; Baillet published his *Jugements des Savants* in 1685-1686,

Morhof his *Polyhistor* in 1689, Chauvin his *Lexicon Rationale sive Thesaurus Philosophicus*, much used later by Harris and by Brucker, in 1692. In the year 1694 appeared Thomas Corneille's *Dictionnaire des arts et des sciences*, an official supplement to the professedly untechnical *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* which had been rendered necessary by the publication of Furetière's *Dictionnaire Universel* (Rotterdam, 1690). Bayle in 1692 undertook to correct the mistakes of Moréri, but his undertaking resulted in the production of his very original and highly successful *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1695-1696), the vast storehouse from which French philosophers borrowed much throughout the eighteenth century to wage their warfare against dogmaticism.

The English were no less active in the same direction than the Continental compilers. In 1704 appeared the first volume of a work which was less philosophical and historical than the compilations of Chauvin and Bayle, and was in purpose similar to those of Furetière and Thomas Corneille: this was the "*Lexicum Technicum*, or an Universal English Dictionary

of Arts and Sciences, explaining not only the terms of art, but the arts themselves," by a fellow of the Royal Society, John Harris.<sup>3</sup> The second volume followed in 1710. It was probably to adapt this book for French readers that the French Jesuits, who had printing works at Trévoux, near Lyons, began in 1704 the publication of the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*. The novelty of Harris's *Lexicum* lay in the fact that, while other compilations were either mere dictionaries, or else special encyclopedias which concerned themselves only with terms and names of history, or philosophy, or belles-lettres, or various sciences, this dictionary was universal in its scope, and claimed to define not only words, but things. John Harris in his Preface criticized the labors of his predecessors, to whom however he acknowledged that he was indebted to no small extent; he had used, beside the periodicals and dictionaries enumerated above, special books of reference, like Ozanam's *Mathematical Dictionary*, the Physical and Chemical Dictionaries by Johnson, Castellus, Blanchard, and many other similar works.

<sup>3</sup> London, 1704 and 1710, 2 vols fol.

This first of the modern practical encyclopedias or technical dictionaries enjoyed great popularity, having by 1736 run through five editions. But it was virtually superseded by another work of general reference which appeared in 1728, written by Ephraim Chambers, a free-thinker and scientist, who in 1729 was elected a member of the Royal Society. This book, like the *Lexicum* with which it was intended to compete, bore its programme on the title-page, as follows: "*Cyclopædia*, or an Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences, containing an explication of the terms, and an account of the things signified thereby, in the several arts, both liberal and mechanical, and the several sciences, human and divine; the figures, kinds, properties, productions, preparations, and uses of things natural and artificial; the rise, progress and state of things ecclesiastical, civil, military, and commercial; with the several systems, sects, opinions, . . . among Philosophers, Divines, Mathematicians, . . . the whole intended as a course of ancient and modern learning, extracted from the best authors, dictionaries, Journals, Memoirs, Transactions,



Ephemerides, . . . in several languages.”<sup>4</sup> It was practically the same universal plan as that of the *Lexicum Technicum*, but broadened, and improved in one particular: to remedy the more or less fragmentary aspect imparted to the work by the alphabetical order of the articles, Chambers had attempted “to consider the several matters not only in themselves, but relatively, or as they respect each other; both to treat them as so many wholes, and as so many parts of some greater whole; their connexion with which to be pointed out by a reference.” This idea of combining the methodical with the alphabetical order, through the system of “references,” was later taken up again in the *Encyclopédie*.

The common fault of both Harris’s and Chambers’s universal dictionaries was obviously their comparatively small size: two folio volumes could not afford adequate space for the

<sup>4</sup> London, 1728 (the preface is dated 1727); 2d edition, 1738, 2 vols fol.; 3d, 4th, and 5th editions in 1739, 1741, 1746.—E. Chambers also published a translation (with P. Shaw) of *A New Method of Chemistry*, by H. Boerhave, 1727;—the *Literary Magazine*, London, 1736 and ff.;—a translation (with J. Martyn) of *The Philosophical History and Memoirs of the Royal Academy of Sciences*, Paris, London, 1742.

fulfilment of a plan of complete as well as universal information. This appears to have been perceived by Ephraim Chambers. In the "Considerations" prefixed to the second edition of the *Cyclopædia*, he informs his readers that he had planned an encyclopedia on a much broader basis than the first; some sheets of it had even been printed, when the printers were deterred from the undertaking by a bill then about to pass in Parliament, "containing a clause to oblige the publishers of all improved editions of books to print their improvements separately."

It was doubtful whether one author working alone, however learned and industrious he might be, could henceforth prove equal to the task of summing up the whole of human knowledge. In spite of the great success of Chambers's *Cyclopædia*, or because of it, an attempt was made by "a Society of Gentlemen" to bring Harris's *Lexicum* up to date, and to outdo Chambers in copiousness both in the text and on the title-page. In 1744 was published a "*Supplement to Dr Harris's Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, explaining not only the terms in Physics, Metaphysics, Ethics, . . . but also the

arts and sciences themselves, together with a just account of the Origin, Progress and State of Things, Offices, Officers, . . ." etc., etc.; "in all which . . . this book is of itself entirely complete, and more copious and extensive than any work of this kind, not excepting Mr. Chambers's *Cyclopædia*, of which it is a very great improvement."<sup>5</sup> This book was probably the outcome of a booksellers' war. It boasted 1,100 more articles than Chambers had, and bitterly attacked the *Cyclopædia*: Chambers was accused of having pillaged the *Lexicum Technicum*, besides Chauvin's *Lexicum Rationale* and the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*. It was alleged that this last compilation had supplied him with three fourths of his book. Whatever the indebtedness of the free-thinking English encyclopedist may have been to the Reverend Fathers of Trévoux, and through them of course to Harris and his predecessors, the partisans of John Harris should have borne in mind that the charge of plagiarism loses much of its weight when preferred against a compiler. Universal information must needs be borrowed, at least in part;

<sup>5</sup> London, 1744, one vol. fol.

no man or society of men can invent everything anew for the purpose of writing an encyclopedia, and, as no work of this kind can claim to be complete and final, the main use of each encyclopedia consists in facilitating the production of later works of a similar nature, improved and augmented. The bibliography of the works which the authors of the *Supplement* acknowledged to have used was practically the same set of scientific periodicals and dictionaries which, growing larger as years went by, had been the common source from which Harris, Chambers, and many others before and after them freely drew.

The continuators of John Harris, sorely affected by Chambers's success, pointed out in their Preface how the *Cyclopædia*, with all its plagiarisms, had supplied a certain Grassineau with materials for a *Dictionnaire de Musique* (at that time, J.-J. Rousseau was contemplating a similar work), and the Chevalier Denis Coetlogon with *An Universal History of Arts and Sciences*, in English; many more books would doubtless appear of the same progeny! It was indeed the next year (1745) that Diderot un-

dertook, on Chambers's plan, an *Encyclopédie* which was destined very much to obscure the fame of both Chambers and Harris.

That a general taste for concrete, useful information was prevalent in England during the first part of the eighteenth century, coinciding with the beginnings of the English industrial development, is sufficiently proved not only by the success of the *Cyclopædia*, and the efforts of Chambers's rivals to win the favor of the public away from him, but also by the large number of other contemporary dictionaries which aimed at instructing in things as well as in words. Of these we need only mention, because Diderot used it, "*A New General English Dictionary*, peculiarly calculated for the use and improvement of such as are unacquainted with the learned languages," etc., begun by the late Rev. Mr Thomas Dyche, completed by William Par-don, Gent.<sup>6</sup> The French *Encyclopédie*, on its title-page, was declared to be "collected from the best authors, and particularly from the English dictionaries by Chambers, Harris, Dyche, etc."

<sup>6</sup> Of this work we have seen only the 3d edition, London, 1740, 1 vol. 8vo.

Together with these English dictionaries and encyclopedias, the editor of the *Encyclopédie* naturally used French dictionaries, particularly that of Bayle. It has never been inquired whether he owed anything to Italian encyclopedias, like V. M. Coronelli's incomplete *Biblioteca Universale Sacro-profana* (1701-1706), or G. Pivati's *Dizionario Universale* (1744) and *Nuovo Dizionario scientifico e curioso sacro-profano* (1746-1751), which were published so shortly before the *Encyclopédie*. At any rate, he used some German compilations, similar in title and purpose to the works already cited, which had appeared during the same period: possibly J. Hübner's *Reales Staats-Zeitungs- und Conversations-Lexicon* (1704), and J. T. Jablonski's *Allgemeines Lexicon der Künste und Wissenschaften* (1721), but certainly J. H. Zedler's *Grosses vollständiges Universal Lexicon Aller Wissenschaften und Künsten*, begun in 1732, completed in 1750 in 64 volumes. As Diderot did not know German, the translation of the articles from the German, which were mostly on topics of chemistry, was made by an anonymous contributor (probably Grimm) who

is mentioned in the opening pages of the second volume of the *Encyclopédie*. Much was also borrowed by Diderot, as will later be shown, from Brucker's *Historia critica philosophiæ*.

Excepting this last work on the history of philosophy, it may be said that on the whole the sources of Diderot's information in the *Encyclopédie*, when it was not derived from his own observations, were mostly French and English. The various collections of Memoirs, Transactions, and periodicals which we have enumerated, several technical dictionaries, like that of Robert James for medicine, the historical or the universal dictionaries of Moréri, Bayle, Harris, Chambers, Dyche, lastly the works of Francis Bacon, which had just been published in the first collection that claimed to be complete (Blackbourne edition, London, 4 vols in-fol., 1730), served as the foundations of the most monumental work of the philosophic age in France.

The eventful history of the *Encyclopédie* is well known. Two foreigners residing in Paris, John Mills and Gottfried Sellius, had in 1743 undertaken to translate Ephraim Chambers's

*Cyclopædia* into French. Their work was completed in 1745, and was announced as *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire Universel des arts et des sciences*, to be published by subscription in four volumes in-folio, and one volume for the plates and indexes. But Mills's ignorance of the French formalities relating to privileges for printing embroiled him in quarrels with his not over-scrupulous publisher Lebreton, by whom eventually he was robbed of his translation and of the profit he might have expected from it. What use may have been made of this first translation we shall try to ascertain in the discussion of the indebtedness of the *Encyclopédie* to the *Cyclopædia*. The Abbé du Gua de Malves, a queer type of scholar and scientist, was for a time made the editor of Mills's translation; but, failing to agree with his fellow-workers, he was finally compelled to resign. Then Diderot, who was still engaged in translating, with Toussaint and Eidous, Robert James's *Medicinal Dictionary*,<sup>7</sup> was asked to edit the *Cyclopædia*. He proposed a vast transformation of the scheme,

<sup>7</sup> London, 3 vols fol., 1743-1745; translated as *Dictionnaire universel de médecine*, Paris, 6 vols fol., 1746-1748.



suggesting that all the most eminent Frenchmen in the sciences, arts, and literature should be invited to contribute to a large and very full *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des arts et des sciences*, to be published by subscription in eight folio volumes, with about 600 plates. A privilege was obtained (1746), and the work was begun. Through many delays and persecutions, also because of the great extension of the undertaking as it proceeded, the first edition of the *Encyclopédie* was completed only in 1765, in 17 volumes in-folio; these were followed by 11 volumes of plates (1762-1772) containing 2,888 plates, then by a supplement in 5 volumes (1776-1777) with 224 plates. It is not within the scope of this study to relate in detail the difficulties which attended the publication of the *Encyclopédie*: the hostile intrigues of the Fathers of Trévoux, the imprisonment of Diderot in consequence of the publication of the *Letter on the Blind*, the suppression of the first two volumes of the *Encyclopédie* by the King's Council (Febr. 9, 1752), the suspension of the enterprise by the Parliament of Paris (March 7, 1759), the shameless mutilation of the last ten

volumes by Lebreton, who was haunted by the fear of the Bastille, and the despair of Diderot, enraged by such treachery, have been dramatically narrated by most biographers of Diderot.

Diderot had undertaken all the articles relating to philosophy and to the mechanical arts, beside the wearisome task of filling in whatever articles were not undertaken by any of the contributors. The less technical of these pieces have been collected and republished in his *Œuvres Complètes* by Assézat and Tourneux (vol. XIII–XVII). Furthermore, he wrote a *Prospectus* of the *Encyclopédie*, while his friend and associate D'Alembert wrote a *Preliminary Discourse*.—Looking over these various contributions, we find in them a strong current of Baconian thought, particularly in the *Prospectus*, the *Preliminary Discourse*, and Diderot's article on "Art"; the articles on the arts and crafts owe very little to English works, but many articles on miscellaneous subjects are directly borrowed from English sources; the articles on philosophy are to a large extent translated from Brucker's Latin History of Philosophy.

Because their undertaking was known to

have owed its inception to Chambers's *Cyclopædia*, the two editors of the *Encyclopédie* seem to have been anxious to disclaim any indebtedness to the English compilation. The great novelty of their encyclopedic plan consisted in having conceived the work as collective: the idea of mustering all the men of genius or talent of one age and country to produce an abstract of human knowledge, the philosophic and scientific testament of a generation, was Diderot's very own. Had it not been for this epoch-making innovation in encyclopedia-writing, the *Encyclopédie* would be of no more interest to us to-day than the translation of James's *Medicinal Dictionary*. The scheme offered great difficulties, and to some contemporaries it seemed impossible of achievement; but Diderot in his *Prospectus* (XIII, 129, n.) answered such doubts with Bacon's own words: "De impossibilitate ita statuo; ea omnia possibilia, et praestabilia censenda, quae ab aliquibus perfici possunt, licet non a quibusvis; et quae a multis conjunctim, licet non ab uno; et quae in successione saeculorum, licet non eodem aevo; et denique quae *multorum* cura et sumptu, licet non opibus

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et industria singulorum.”<sup>8</sup> With this great collective work in view, Diderot had found Chambers’s dictionary, when he had looked it through in the translation (XIII, 131), very unsatisfactory in many respects. Chambers had borrowed “without discrimination and discretion” from many well-known dictionaries in the French language. His treatment of the mechanical arts was very insufficient; he was prone to discard their technicalities, and did not emphasize enough the importance of that branch of useful knowledge. His book had only 30 plates, whereas the *Encyclopédie* was to have at least 600; we have seen that eventually it had 2,888, and with the Supplement 3,112 plates. Lastly, Chambers in his Preface had given a table or “pedigree” of sciences and arts, in rather too concise a form, supplementing his enumerations with many “etcæteras.” Diderot pointed to D’Alembert’s *Discourse* for a really valuable classification of human knowledge, based on Bacon’s classification, which was not established

<sup>8</sup> Bacon, *De Augm. Scient.*, Lib. II, cap. I, (Sped., II, 185). Diderot refers to p. 103, which shows that he was using the Amsterdam edition, 1662; he substitutes “multorum” for “publica.”

according to the objects of the arts and sciences, but according to the mental faculties of man. The *Encyclopédie* followed the *Cyclopædia* in excluding history from its scope, in allowing biography only in an incidental way, and in making frequent use of "references" in order to reconcile the methodical with the alphabetical order.

Having escaped the possible charge of having performed a mere adaptation of Chambers's *Cyclopædia*, Diderot and D'Alembert were accused of having plagiarized Bacon. As far as their classification of sciences is concerned, this charge is plainly absurd. Diderot took the trouble to refute these malevolent suggestions in some *Observations on the Chancellor Bacon's Division of Sciences* joined to his *Prospectus* (XIII, 159-164). He had indeed written in the *Prospectus*: "If we have successfully emerged from this vast operation (of the classification of sciences), our principal debt will be to the Chancellor Bacon, who sketched the plan of a universal dictionary of the sciences and arts at a time when there were not, so to say, either arts or sciences. That extraordinary

genius, being unable to make the history of what was known, wrote the history of what should be learned" (XIII, 133-134). But now he had to show that indebtedness was not synonymous with a servile translation of Bacon's words. The truth is, that the two classifications of sciences illustrate in a striking manner the progress accomplished in the sciences between 1600 and 1750. The new division of medicine was from Boerhave; the rather antiquated classification of the physical sciences given by Bacon had been entirely recast; and the places of several sciences or arts, such as Music and Painting, put by Bacon under Medicine as belonging to the Science of Pleasure, had been altered.

On the subject of the dignity of the mechanical arts, or trades, the indebtedness of Diderot to Bacon is obvious, and, far from attempting to conceal it, he emphasized it by many quotations from the English philosopher. Yet the relentless enemies of the *Encyclopédie* made the most of what he himself told them, and tried at once to spread the belief that his article on "Art," which he had sent as a specimen to the Jesuit Père Berthier, of the *Journal de Trévoux*,

was copied verbatim from Bacon. A translation of a part of this article will show that Diderot, advocating with Bacon the necessity of bestowing more attention on the useful arts and crafts, in other words, of developing Applied Sciences by a closer alliance between the speculative and the practical activities of man, united in one strong plea ideas, examples, and quotations from various writings of the leading spirit of scientific thought whose authority he acknowledged :

A distinction, he wrote, has early been established between the liberal and the mechanical arts. "This distinction, although well founded, has had a bad effect, in debasing some very worthy and useful people, and strengthening in us I know not what natural laziness, which was already impelling us but too strongly to believe that to apply ourselves steadily and constantly to experiments and to particular, material objects of our senses was to derogate from the dignity of the human mind, and that to practise or even to study the mechanical arts was to stoop to things the research of which is laborious, the meditation base, the exposition difficult, the handling disgraceful, the number inexhaustible, and the value trifling. *Minui majestatem mentis humanæ, si in experimentis et rebus particulari-*

*bus*, etc. (Bacon, *Novum Organum*).<sup>9</sup> A prejudice which might tend to fill the cities with proud disputers and useless contemplators, and the country with petty tyrants full of ignorance, idleness, and disdain. Not thus thought Bacon, one of the foremost geniuses of England; nor Colbert, one of the greatest ministers of France; nor the sound minds and wise men of all ages. Bacon considered the history of the mechanical arts as the most important branch of true philosophy;<sup>10</sup> he therefore took good care not to despise their practise. Colbert considered the nation's industry and the establishment of manufactures as the safest wealth of a kingdom. According to those who to-day have sound notions of the value of things, the man who peopled France with engravers, painters, sculptors, and artists of every kind, who snatched from the English the secret of the stocking-loom, who took the velvets from the Genoese, the looking-glasses from the Venetians, did hardly less for the State than the men who beat its

<sup>9</sup> *Nov. Org.*, I, Aphor. 83: "Minui nempe mentis humanæ majestatem, si experimentis et rebus particularibus, sensui subjectis et in materia determinatis, diu ac multum versetur: præsertim quum hujusmodi res ad inquirendum laboriosæ, ad meditandum ignobiles, ad dicendum asperæ, ad practicam illiberales, numero infinitæ, et subtilitate tenues esse soleant."—Same thought, in a slightly different form, in *Cogitata et Visa* (Sped., VII, 114) and in *Filum Labyrinthi* (Sped., VI, 427).

<sup>10</sup> *Nov. Org.*, I, Aphor. 29.



enemies and took their strongholds by storm; and, in the eyes of the philosopher, there may be more real credit in having given rise to the Le Bruns, Le Sueurs, and Audrans, in having had the battles of Alexander painted and engraved, and the successes of our generals worked in tapestries, than there had been in winning those victories. Put on one side of the scales the real advantages of the most sublime sciences and of the most honored arts, and on the other side those of the mechanical arts, and you will find that the esteem in which the ones and the others have been severally held has not been granted in a just proportion to those advantages, and that more praise has been given to the men who were busy in making us believe that we were happy than to the men who were concerned in causing us to be really happy. How queer our judgments are! We require that people should be usefully employed, and we despise useful men" (XIII, 361).

Then, in the spirit of the *Novum Organum* and the other works of Bacon "on the interpretation of nature," which, as we have seen, were at the same time inspiring his own *Pensées sur l'interprétation de la nature*, Diderot suggests that a complete treatise of the mechanical arts should be written:

“And let no one imagine that these are vain ideas which I propose, or that I promise chimerical discoveries to men. Having remarked, with a philosopher whom I am never weary of praising because I have never grown weary of reading him, that the history of nature is incomplete without that of the arts, and having invited naturalists to crown their work on the vegetable, mineral, animal kingdoms, and so forth, by the experiments of the mechanical arts, the knowledge of which is of great importance to true philosophy, I shall dare add with him: *Ergo rem quam ago, non opinionem, sed opus esse; eamque non sectæ alicujus, aut placiti, sed utilitatis esse et amplitudinis immensæ fundamenta.*<sup>11</sup> This is not a system, nor a man’s fanciful imaginings; these are the verdicts of experience and reason, and the foundations of an immense edifice; and whoever shall think differently shall seek to make the sphere of our knowledge narrower and to discourage men’s minds. We owe to chance a large number of the things we know; it has offered us many important things which we were not seeking: is it to be presumed that we shall find nothing, when we add our efforts to its caprice, and put some order and method in our researches?<sup>12</sup> If at present we possess

<sup>11</sup> *Cogitata et Visa* (Sped., VII, 140). A slightly different version is to be found in the preface of the *Instauratio Magna* (Sped., I, 210).

<sup>12</sup> Bacon, *On the Adv. of Learning* (Sped., VI, 261–262); *Nov. Org.*, I, Aph. 7.

some secrets for which formerly no man was hoping, and if from the past we are allowed to draw conjectures, why should not the future have riches in store for us which we hardly expect to-day? Had anyone, a few centuries ago, told those who measure the possibility of things by the scope of their intellects, and who imagine nothing beyond what they know, that there is a certain powder which blasts rocks, which overthrows the thickest walls from amazing distances, and a few pounds of which, enclosed within the deep entrails of the earth, shakes them, makes its way through the enormous masses which cover it, and may open an abyss in which a whole city could disappear, those people would not have failed to compare those effects to the action of the wheels, pulleys, levers, weights, and other known machines, and to pronounce that such a powder is chimerical, and that only lightning, or the cause which produces earthquakes through an inimitable mechanism, is capable of producing those frightful prodigies.<sup>13</sup> Thus spoke that great philosopher to his age and to all the ages to come. We shall add, to follow his example: How many silly arguments would have arisen concerning the project of that machine for raising water by

<sup>13</sup> Directly from *Nov. Org.*, I, Aphor. 109-110, and less directly from Aphor. 129 and the *Cogitata et Visa* (Sped., VII, 134).

fire,<sup>14</sup> as it was for the first time constructed in London, especially if the author of the machine had been modest enough to represent himself as a man of little skill in mechanics? If the world was peopled only with such appreciators of inventions, neither great nor small things could be accomplished. Let those therefore who hasten to decide concerning works which imply no contradiction, which sometimes are merely slight additions to some known machines, and which at most require a skilled workman, let those who are so narrow-minded as to deem those works impossible be aware that they themselves know too little even to make reasonable wishes. The Chancellor Bacon tells them so:<sup>15</sup> *Qui sumpta, or what is even less pardonable, qui neglecta ex his quæ præsta sunt conjectura, ea aut impossibilia, aut minus verisimilia, putet; eum scire debere se non satis doctum, ne ad optandum quidem commode et apposite esse*" (XIII, 364-365).

Reverting to the subject of the bright anticipations of future progress in science which are warranted by marvelous discoveries in the past, Diderot again takes up three favorite illustra-

<sup>14</sup> This is the steam engine invented by Capt. Thomas Savery (1698), described and illustrated by John Harris in his *Lexicum*, article "Engine."

<sup>15</sup> *Cogitata et Visa* (Sped., VII, 135). Diderot adds "qui neglecta" to Bacon's text.

tions from Bacon:<sup>16</sup> "With the English philosopher, I shall dwell on three inventions of which the ancients had no knowledge, and the authors of which (be it said to the shame of modern history and poetry) are almost unknown: I mean the art of printing, the discovery of gunpowder, and of the property of the magnetic needle" (XIII, 370). At a time when the identity of lightning with the electricity generated in laboratories was being demonstrated, and, as we have seen, the identity of magnetic and electric phenomena was at least conjectured, when chemistry as a science was coming into existence, and when, especially in England, most of the trades underwent those great transformations and improvements which brought about modern industrialism, Bacon's prophecies seemed more than ever pregnant with truth. The first steam engines, the mechanical looms, the improved methods of tillage, which were about to revolutionize English life, appeared as so many proofs of the beneficial results which Bacon had expected from the alliance of thought and "works," the natural philosopher and the

<sup>16</sup> *Cogitata et Visa* (Sped., VII, 130); etc.

artisan, the scientific and the practical activities of mankind.

Such is the broad significance of Diderot's enthusiastic praises of the mechanical arts, and of his unbounded admiration for Bacon. His article on "Art" concludes with a perhaps ill-advised invitation to the liberal arts to celebrate the hitherto despised useful arts, instead of singing their own praises for ever. Such philosophic poems have often been attempted, both before and since Diderot's time, with indifferent success. The encyclopedist further invited kings to protect the useful trades, according to one of the wisest traditions of the French monarchy; he begged the scientists not too readily to condemn inventions as useless, and asked the artisans to take advice from the scientists, to become communicative, so as not to deprive society of those valuable secrets which they might have chanced to discover, and not to believe, on the other hand, that their respective arts had reached the utmost degree of perfection.

The son of the skilled cutler of Langres was better fitted than any other man in France at that time to understand and to propagate the

practical meaning of Bacon's message. While D'Alembert in the *Discours préliminaire* had paid a glowing tribute to Bacon as the master of true philosophy, that is, Natural Philosophy or Science, and had improved his division of sciences into a classification which stood unrivalled until Auguste Comte's, the indebtedness of Diderot to Bacon, both in the *Pensées sur l'interprétation de la nature* and in the *Encyclopédie* (particularly in the article "Art"), may be summed up under two heads: practical advice for the advancement of scientific knowledge, and directions for the improvement of the practical arts of life. No man could be less inclined than Diderot to consider the practical side of life as mean or ignoble; no man in his age showed more genuine interest in all that pertained to the mill and the workshop. In our age of technical schools and technical books, encyclopedia editors no longer have to turn into workmen for days together; but Diderot certainly enjoyed that practical side of his study of the mechanical arts. Withal he was not, any more than Bacon, a narrow utilitarian. The applications of science, though very important in themselves, did not

seem to him more important than science itself: pure science, disinterested knowledge must remain the common aim of all true philosophers. "The true way of philosophizing," to quote once more Diderot's very Baconian *Thought*, "should have been and should be to apply the understanding to the understanding; the understanding and experiment, to the senses; the senses, to nature; nature, to the investigation of instruments; instruments, to the research and improvement of arts, which would be thrown to the common people to teach them to respect philosophy."

Now, English thought since Bacon had been, with few exceptions, essentially practical. The Royal Society for a century had worked along the lines indicated by the author of the *Novum Organum*, while the awakening of the industrial spirit had brought into being a large number of useful appliances and an ever-growing host of practical inventors. Indeed France had not been behind in devising new instruments and machines for the improvement of manufactures and the greater comfort of life: the products of



her industry in the eighteenth century were exported into all parts of Europe, and still serve as models to manufacturers in the twentieth century. With all the secrets of the national industries Diderot indefatigably tried to get a first-hand acquaintance. We might expect him also abundantly to have used English works regarding the progress of the arts and crafts in England. Unfortunately, works of that kind were scarce, and the contemporary English encyclopedias gave little or none of the practical information which he sought. Harris and Chambers had devoted more attention to the sciences and arts properly so-called, and had been content to give historical instead of descriptive accounts of the trades. An accurate description of the processes and the products of industry in all its branches was the want which Diderot made it his task to supply. We shall presently see, in a few concrete instances from the *Encyclopédie*, how he added the result of his original researches to the historical disquisitions of his predecessors.

For the second part of his programme as contributor to the *Encyclopédie*, namely the articles

on philosophy, Diderot found little to satisfy him in Chambers. He went to Bayle and other sources; above all he borrowed largely, as we shall show, from a bulky Latin work by the Hanoverian Jacob Brucker, member of the Royal Society of Berlin: his *Historia Critica Philosophiæ* had appeared at Leipzig (1742–1744) in four volumes (five tomes), with a “sixth volume” of *Supplement* in 1767. The work was dedicated to George II, “regi ac domino meo.” Of course, our consideration of Diderot’s indebtedness to Brucker will not be based merely on this allegiance so proudly acknowledged by the German historian of philosophy, but on the fact that much of the learning apparently derived by Diderot in his articles on philosophy from English works came to him through Brucker’s book.

To begin with Diderot’s articles on the sciences, arts, and trades. Earlier in this chapter it has been seen how the article on “Art,” which was printed separately in 1751 and launched as a specimen, after the *Prospectus* of 1750, was made original by Diderot’s development of the

section concerning "mechanical *arts*," imbued throughout with the spirit of Bacon. The treatment of "Agriculture" was in a similar manner enlarged and transformed, from the meagre, untechnical articles in Chambers on "Earth," "Soil," "Tilling," etc., by a liberal use of Jethro Tull's works,<sup>17</sup> first collected in one edition in 1743. Diderot strongly advocated the Tullian method, praised Duhamel's work in the same direction, and invited the great and the rich to improve the agriculture of the kingdom by experiments. Voltaire and the Maréchal de Noailles were among the first disciples of Tull in France, and two years after Diderot's article had appeared the works of Tull were translated into French (1753).

Another example will show how Diderot sup-

"Jethro Tull (1674-1741) observed methods of tillage in France and Italy, 1711-1714; published his *Horse-Hoing Husbandry*, 1731; again, *The Horse-Hoing Husbandry, or an Essay on the Principles of Tillage and Vegetation*, 1733; replied to attacks in a *Supplement to the Essay* . . ., 1735; *Addenda*, 1738; *Conclusion*, 1739. The whole was collected in a 2d edition, 1743; 3d edition, 1751; republished with alterations by William Cobbett, 1822. Two undertakings to translate his works into French were blended into one by Duhamel, from 1753 to 1757, with commentaries.

plied the absence of technical books by his direct observations. Under the article "Stocking," Chambers had mentioned the stocking-loom, discussed the French and English claims to its invention, giving the credit of it to a Frenchman, and concluded by stating that the machine was too complicated for description. This was characteristic of the deficiency of earlier encyclopedias which Diderot intended to remedy.<sup>18</sup> By him the stocking-loom was not so lightly dismissed: he went to see it, had it explained to him, learned to work it, then had its very numerous parts designed and engraved, and wrote a full article and the explanatory text of the plates. In substituting this thorough and painstaking method of work for that of mere compilation, he was the initiator of all succeeding encyclopedias worthy of the name. For what

<sup>18</sup> A quotation will show how startling this deficiency was, which had struck Diderot so much: "A frame or machine made of polished iron," Chambers had written; "the structure whereof is exceedingly ingenious, but withal exceedingly complex, so that it were very difficult to describe it well, by reason of the diversity and number of its parts; nor is it even conceived, without a deal of difficulty, when working before the face." (*Cyclopædia*, article "Stocking-Loom.")

should we think to-day of an encyclopedia in which we found, for instance, a definition and a history of the locomotive, or the turbine, or the automobile, or the aeroplane motor, followed by a statement that such machines are too complicated to be described?

At other times, Chambers's articles are enlivened with unexpected additions of a philosophic nature which are Diderot's very own. Under the word "Aigle," Diderot faithfully transcribes the whole of Chambers's article "Eagle," treated from the point of view of ornithology and mythology; he adds some particulars from Willoughby's *Ornithology*; and, on his way, blending the wish to conciliate the temporal and spiritual powers of the land with a strong inclination to laugh at them in their faces, he relinquishes the bird of Jove and the fable of Ganymede to exclaim: "A hundred times happy is the people to whom religion offers nothing to believe but true, sublime, and holy things, nothing to imitate but virtuous actions! Such a one is ours, in which the philosopher needs but to follow his reason to arrive at the foot of our altars."

Chambers's humor occasionally ran in a vein comparable to that of Bayle or Voltaire. Speaking of "Butter," he notes that Schookius, *De butyro et aversione casei*, has wondered whether Abraham knew butter, and, if he did, whether that was not precisely the food with which he treated the angels who came to visit him. Diderot (article "Beurre") found the whole piece too good not to be inserted, with Schookius's name and the title of his valuable book. Then he proceeded to give the more essential information which Chambers had neglected, namely, the methods in use for making butter.

Some other curiosities, fraught with more scientific interest, also passed bodily from the *Cyclopædia* into the *Encyclopédie*. Such for instance is the collection of cases of people who had swallowed fruit-stones, pins, etc., collected by Chambers (article "Swallowing") from the *Philosophical Transactions*. The article "Avaler" reproduces the English text and references word for word, yet with some puzzling inaccuracies: for instance, "a lad sixteen years of age," who was reported to have swallowed a needle which later came out of his shoulder,

unaccountably becomes "une fille âgée de dix ans," and the "docteur Christ Weserton" is the French rendering of "Dr Christ. Wessenon," who had reported the case.

In truth, these blunders and the reckless method of plagiarism which the most casual comparison of the *Encyclopédie* with the *Cyclopædia* will suffice to lay bare are not exactly chargeable to Diderot. What is wholly borrowed from Chambers or some one else, and published by Diderot "as editor," not "as author," is marked with an asterisk; but how can the distinction be made between the editor and the author when, as is often the case, Diderot adds long developments of his own to the borrowed matter? These developments generally being of a technical nature, a strange result has occurred: what is really Chambers's text, in many articles, has been reprinted in Diderot's *Œuvres Complètes*, the reprint often stopping exactly where Diderot's own share, the technical, begins. In the case of articles wholly or almost wholly taken from the *Cyclopædia*, such as "Anagramme," "Avaler," "Beurre," "Onomancie," etc., Diderot may have been guilty of

negligence in allowing the *membra disjecta* of Mills's translation to find their way whole and unaltered, yet with inaccuracies, to the printing-press. He may have been unable to collate them all, before or after printing, with the English original, if indeed he was always aware of their origin when he found them among his papers. Still, when every allowance is made for the difficulties of his editorial task, it must be acknowledged that he was naturally inclined to be as free a borrower as he was a generous lender. It is certain that, on subjects of minor importance, those mere curiosities of science, erudition, or history which had served to enliven preceding encyclopedias, he never scrupled to copy English articles literally.

In proof of this, a few examples will suffice. The article "Albadara" (the Arabic name of the sesamoid bone of the first joint of the big toe), containing medical cases which tended to prove that the amputation of that bone cured convulsions, is wholly taken from Robert James's *Medicinal Dictionary*. On the sect of the Seekers (article "Chercheurs"), there is a free transcription from the French *Dictionnaire*



*historique* of Moréri. The recipe for writing Pindaric odes (article "Pindarique") is literally from Chambers, as well as the statement that Cowley is the best English Pindaric poet. Chambers's paragraph on the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, under the general heading "Society," supplies the material of the article "Propagation de l'Evangile," the spirit of which is unmistakably Diderot's, from the vehemence of a denunciation of the presumption and interference of missionaries in foreign lands, with which the article concludes, and of which there is not one word in Chambers. On the other hand, the English article on "Prophecy" is much bolder than the French article "Prophétie," which is inspired from it but evidently toned down. Another article borrowed from Chambers and much enlarged in the *Encyclopédie* may be said to have indirectly brought about the first outburst of persecution against that work, in 1752. Of "Certitude" Chambers had distinguished three kinds: the metaphysical, the physical, and the moral. Concerning this last, he had quoted some figures from the *Philosophical Transactions* tend-

ing to show how the certainty of a fact was bound to dwindle to nothing through oral transmission, in a ratio corresponding to the number of successive transmitters. To this calculation, apparently dangerous for religious tradition, Diderot subjoined an extensive dissertation by the Abbé de Prades, his friend, combating both the English mathematician who had thus criticized the reliability of oral tradition and some of Diderot's sceptical *Pensées philosophiques* on the same subject. The friendliness between the philosopher and his orthodox opponent was obvious, and was soon after used to implicate both in trouble, on the occasion of De Prades's thesis in the Sorbonne.

The article "Résurrection" in the *Encyclopédie*, though wholly taken from Chambers, yet bears clear traces of Diderot's hand. Chambers writes: "The great argument for the truth of christianity, and that urged with the most force and conviction for the same, is drawn from the resurrection of Our Saviour.—The circumstances thereof are such as almost admit of a demonstration; which has accordingly been attempted on the strict principles of the geometricians.

See Ditton *on the resurrection*." This passage is followed by philosophic objections, rather strongly put, with replies to the objections, and a reference to the article "Identity," inspired from Locke. Diderot translates with a freedom that verges on inaccuracy, as will better appear in the French text: "L'argument qu'on tire de sa résurrection (de Jésus-Christ) en faveur de la vérité de la religion chrétienne est un de ceux qui pressent avec le plus de force et de conviction. Les circonstances en sont telles, qu'elles portent ce point jusqu'à la démonstration, suivant la méthode des géomètres, comme Ditton l'a exécuté avec succès." But all this orthodox emphasis is amply counterbalanced in the sequel by an equal or greater emphasis laid on Chambers's objections; a similar reference to the article "Identité" brings the reader to another less close borrowing from the *Cyclopædia*.

Many of the articles of Diderot on the mechanical arts would show that it was his constant practice to start from the *Cyclopædia*, to make a few additions on the way, and, when the technical part was too deficient in Chambers,

to enter into very full developments of his own. The articles "Email," "Carrosse," "Livre" are good examples of his method; let us consider his retouches in the last two of these. The article "Carrosse" has been partly reprinted in the latest edition of the *Œuvres*; the article "Livre" will be found in volume IX of the *Encyclopédie*. In "Carrosse," the historical information is from Chambers (article "Coach"), the technical is by Diderot. To the legal London cab-fares, as established by Statute 14 Car. II—which becomes in French "le quatrième statut de Charles II"—Diderot adds for comparison the fares of public carriages in Paris. His practical mind leads him to suggest the appointment of an official to receive the fares and start the coaches, as a means of preventing the drivers from fleecing the public and defrauding their employers. As Pascal in the seventeenth century had conceived the modern notion of omnibuses, Diderot in the eighteenth came very near an idea that is more modern still, that of taximeters.—The article "Livre" closely follows Chambers's article "Book." To distinguish a "book" from a "volume," a dis-

creet little advertisement is here inserted by Diderot: "*L'Histoire de la Grèce de Temple Stanyan est un fort bon livre, divisé en trois petits volumes.*" The references of Chambers are copied, sometimes simplified, at the risk of misleading the reader. To the German boast, recorded by Chambers, of the excellence of their learned catalogues, Diderot retorts by giving an imposing list of French scholars. A blunder slips in which cannot be ascribed to Mills in the translation of the following passage: *Cyclopædia*—"As flexible matters came to be wrote on, they (the ancients) found it more convenient to make their books in form of rolls"; *Encyclopédie*—"Quand les anciens avaient des matières un peu longues à traiter, ils se servaient plus commodément de feuilles ou de peaux cousues les unes au bout des autres, qu'on nommait rouleaux." On the other hand, it is hard to believe that Diderot could have been so ignorant or so careless as to translate Chambers's reference "Vid. Nouv. Rep. Lett., T. 39, p. 427," by "Voyez la nouv. républ. des Lettres, tome XXXIX, p. 427." The models given by Chambers for bookkeeping are copied with

trifling alterations, but the main body of the article which follows this paragraph is more freely treated.

To sum up, Diderot was right when he had written in his *Prospectus*: "Chambers has read books, but hardly seen any artisans; yet there are many things which can only be learnt in the workshops." These things Diderot spared no trouble to learn. For the rest, he mostly relied on Chambers; all the articles or part of articles of miscellaneous information which he found satisfactory in the *Cyclopædia* were appropriated by him, with very slight alterations, for the *Encyclopédie*. He may sometimes have used fragments of Mills's translation, with or without the knowledge of their origin. But there is enough evidence in his additions, emendations, and defective translations, that he often had recourse himself to the *Cyclopædia*. The stricter views of our age concerning literary honesty may lead us to regret that in those cases the name of Chambers was not more often quoted in the columns of the *Encyclopédie*, and that the acknowledgment of the indebtedness of the French to the English work was almost confined to the

title-page. It should however be remembered that eighteenth-century ideas on this subject were broader than ours, for at that time the notion of literary property was hardly in existence, especially in respect to works of this kind; and of international copyright there was of course no question.

Diderot's free method of dealing with information gathered by other people attracted indeed some notice in his own age: not in relation to the *Cyclopædia*, but to Brucker's *Historia Critica Philosophiæ*, the substance and the language of which were more familiar to the learned. In 1773, the *Nouvelles Littéraires* of Berlin accused Diderot of having stolen his articles on the history of philosophy from Brucker's book.<sup>19</sup> He had acknowledged that he owed something to that "excellent work," as well as to the *Histoire de la philosophie* by Deslandes (article "Philosophie"; *Œuv.*, XVI, 280). But can such a passing reference be judged sufficient, when it is true that a large number of Diderot's articles on philosophy are

<sup>19</sup> See M. Tournoux, *Diderot et Catherine II*, Paris, 1899, p. 527, note.

but extracts or abstracts from Brucker's ponderous *History*?

To begin at the very beginning, Diderot had an article on the "Philosophie antédiluvienne," discussing the thesis of some historians of philosophy who, probably for the sake of thoroughness, had formed a philosophy of Adam and his progeny down to Noah. This, except a few additions, and a digression on the *Essay on Virtue or Merit*, is from one of the early chapters of Brucker. It seems to be, like Schookius's *De Butyro*, a topic adduced rather for the entertainment than for the instruction of the reader, as Brucker himself had been gay over it all. The article on Arabic philosophy ("Arabes—Etat de la philosophie chez les anciens Arabes") learnedly quotes the names of Hottinguer, Pocock, Hyde, "le docte Spencer," and expatiates on the subject of Zabianism, or the worship of celestial bodies. It is a résumé, luckily made lighter and almost readable, of Brucker's chapter "De philosophia veterum Arabum," down to paragraph 9 (*Hist. crit. phil.*, vol. I, pp. 213–228), from which "doctus Spencerus" and his fellows have passed into the French. One cannot help remarking on the way that the unfortunate translator



turns "Islamismus" into "Islamime," mistaking a common designation of the Mohammedan religion for the name of its founder. Again, what the *Encyclopédie* offers concerning Chaldaic philosophy, the Mosaic and Christian philosophy (articles "Juifs" and "Mosaïque"), and other less familiar fields of human thought, comes from the same source.<sup>20</sup> In the examination of the attempts made by some writers to reconcile Christian beliefs with rationalism, Brucker is more painstaking, Diderot more petulant. "Je ne sais ce que Bigot a prétendu . . .," he exclaims impatiently (XVI, 125); and indeed nobody knows, except Bayle, who alone had read Bigot and been used by Brucker for information.<sup>21</sup> So that on the whole we come to wonder what Feverlinus, Glassius, Zeisoldius, Valesius, Bochartus, Scheuchzerus, Grabovius, etc., have to do with us and with an

<sup>20</sup> For Diderot's articles on the "Romains et Etrusques," see Brucker, vol. I, pp. 342 ff., and II, pp. 7-70;—"Sarrasins," Vol. III, pp. 3 ff. (the poetical fragment from Sadi on p. 209);—"Chaldéens," vol. I, pp. 102 ff.;—"Chinois," vol. V, pp. 846 ff.;—etc.

<sup>21</sup> Brucker, vol. IV, p. 614, declares that he relies on Bayle concerning Bigot's book, "ut hunc librum sæpius quæsitum invenire non potuimus."

*Encyclopédie* designed to make learning popular, especially when Diderot stops short in his enumeration to leave out the embarrassing name of "Bossuetus." In all these pages he follows Brucker ("Philosophia Hebræorum," vol. II, pp. 653 ff., and "De Philosophicis Mosaïcis et Christianis," vol. IV, pp. 610 ff.), to the end of his review of the principles of Comenius. Was it worth while to inform the readers of the *Encyclopédie* of the existence of so many obscure writers, even for the sake of having a fling at Dickenson and Burnet because they had endeavored to reconcile Genesis with modern science? Diderot's encyclopedic consciousness went at times a little far.

It must of course be allowed that on such questions it was much better for him to adapt the work of a specialist to his own ends, and to make it readable to all, than to waste his time in a personal investigation of matters deservedly forgotten. But, when the question is about the greater schools or systems of philosophy, the situation is different. While there is hardly any disgrace in translating Brucker's Latin on such topics as the philosophy of Enoch, or of

the Jews after the Captivity ("Philosophia Hebræorum post captivitatem Babyloniam *nulla*," we are told, vol. II, p. 653), or the systems of the Scythians, the Saracens, and the Chinese, it is hardly excusable in a professed philosopher to resort to the same method in relation to Eclecticism, Epicurism, Platonism, or the systems of Hobbes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, and Locke.

Now, with the exception of the articles on Leibnitz and Spinoza, almost everything that Diderot writes concerning modern philosophy is freely compiled from Brucker. It often happens of course that original reflections usher in the topic treated, or are mingled in its development. But, for the biographies of philosophers, modern as well as ancient, it is Diderot's constant practice to translate Brucker in a cursory way, as he used to translate Shaftesbury, leaving out lengthy developments, tedious discussions of authorities, and generally whatever would be of no interest to the average reader. Whenever also an abstract of a philosophy is given, in the shape of brief propositions (sometimes, but not always, numbered), we are in

presence of Brucker's own work, which in such cases always affects the form of short paragraphs. The only difference is, that Brucker regularly begins by outlining the life, then proceeds with the system of a given philosopher; Diderot occasionally inverts this order, as in the articles "Eclectisme," "Epicurisme,"<sup>22</sup> but the substance remains the same.

A more distinctive difference between Diderot and Brucker is, that while the German historian is generally objective and impersonal in his estimate of philosophic systems, the Encyclopedist perpetually tends to a very subjective kind of appreciation. For instance, Eclecticism with him becomes the philosophy of all sound thinkers, and is made synonymous with rationalism and free-thinking; a confusion which proves useful for polemical purposes when he comes to relate the conflict between the Alexandrine Syncretists and the early Christians,

<sup>22</sup> These two articles are specially interesting in that they serve to expound Diderot's own philosophy in an indirect manner. Naigeon wondered whence Diderot had taken his material for the discourse in which Epicurus is supposed to develop his system (*Œuv.*, XIV, 527, n.); it comes from Brucker, vol. I, pp. 1255-1315, and hints on modern Epicurianism are from vol. IV, pp. 503 ff.

Hypatia and Cyril: In the same manner, the philosophy of the Romans and the Etruscans, or that of the Theosophists, affords good starting-points for vigorous outbursts against superstition. Here, as in a hundred other passages in his works, Diderot uses the borrowed matter to make fresh developments from it, as a preacher starts from a text, or (to use a more appropriate simile) as a brilliant talker launches forth from a passing remark into an eloquent digression.

In some questions connected with the history of philosophy, concerning which the prevailing orthodoxy did not allow of any latitude, Brucker, who we may assume was a sound Lutheran, was a safe refuge. The article "Jésus-Christ" would be exceedingly interesting to study as an illustration of the way in which the editor of the *Encyclopédie* managed, with his semi-orthodox German source of information, to comply with the duty imposed upon him to write in conformity with Catholic beliefs. In this case, Brucker's marginal titles, "Christiana religio philosophia sensu excellentiori," and "Jesus Christus utrum philosophus fuerit?" (vol. III, pp. 242-247) gave him the cue for the beginning of his arti-

cle, which for exoteric readers is reassuringly orthodox. But presently, when Christ and the apostles are denied the title of philosophers by Brucker, with an abundance of quotations to that effect from the Fathers and other authorities, Diderot does not fail to convey his esoteric meaning to such as are prepared to receive it, by means of those same quotations. One cannot help wondering how Brucker would have appreciated the use thus made of his learning; probably not any better than Saunderson's friends had appreciated the liberties taken with the religious beliefs of Saunderson in the *Letter on the Blind*.

On the two great English philosophers whose influence, with that of Bacon, was paramount in the Encyclopedic circle, Diderot again uses Brucker's *History*. For Hobbes (article "Hobbesisme"), he rather closely follows the *Historia Critica Philosophiæ* (vol. V, 145-199), concluding however with a return to the discussion of Hobbes's character, which introduces a curious parallel between the English philosopher and Rousseau. The whole article betrays an evident sympathy for Hobbes's materialism,

veiled under an apparently scrupulous care in quoting his most startling propositions verbatim, and a strong feeling of repulsion for his moral and political theories.

"Locke" is made the subject of a short article which is disappointing. A biography, abridged from Brucker, is followed by a brief review of three topics of Lockian philosophy with which eighteenth-century readers had grown familiar: the reduction of all the contents of the understanding to sensation; the theory of education; and the admission that matter itself might be endowed with thought. On the first question, Diderot goes further than Locke; he chooses to ignore "reflection," the second source of "ideas" in Locke's *Essay*, and concludes that such of our ideas as have no equivalent in nature are vain and void of meaning.<sup>23</sup> Hence may have arisen that scheme of a philosophical dictionary which

<sup>23</sup> A passage in the *Paradoxe sur le comédien* (VIII, 390) shows how deeply rooted the idea was in Diderot that whatever has its origin in the mind only has no existence: "But since (that model) is ideal, it does not exist: now, there is nothing in the understanding which has not been in sensation." "That is true." It is easy to perceive why Berkeley's immaterialism grated so on his sense.

he later expounded in his *Letters to Falconet* (XVIII, 232), and which, had he been able to carry it out, he intended to offer as a monument of gratitude to Catherine II.<sup>24</sup> Locke's pedagogic ideas give Diderot the opportunity of sketching a plan for an education along "natural" lines which in several respects makes the reader think of the yet unpublished *Emile* of Rousseau. The discussion by Diderot of Locke's suggestion, that matter might think if it was so ordained by God, tends to prove that it contains nothing alarming for any established creed. Then the article stops very abruptly, and we cannot help suspecting that Lebreton must have curtailed it: for how could Diderot have foregone such an occasion of giving at least a few hints of his favorite theories on life and matter? One reason for the reverence in which Locke was held by the whole French school of mechanistic psychologists in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, from Condillac to Cabanis, is clearly given in the following digression of Diderot concerning Locke's

<sup>24</sup> Locke seemed to call for such a work, in his *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Book III, particularly Chapt. IX.



studies in medicine: "To write about metaphysics belongs only to the man who has practised medicine for a long time; he alone has seen the phenomena, the machine quiet or furious, weak or full of vigor, sound or shattered, delirious or well-regulated, successively imbecile, enlightened, torpid, noisy, dumb, lethargic, acting, living, and dead." The whole gist of the *Rapports du physique et du moral*, and generally of physiological psychology, is in that passage.

Concerning Leibnitz and Spinoza, which are less important in this study, let us note that Diderot combined other sources with Brucker, his most usual because most copious reference. He copied abundantly from Fontenelle's *Eloge* for the biography of Leibnitz, but his bibliography of references is taken from Brucker (vol. V, 336-337) as well as his abstract of Leibnitzianism (vol. V, 398-446). For Spinoza, Brucker being very insufficient, he drew largely from Bayle, adding some objections of his own.<sup>25</sup> The article on Descartes is by D'Alem-

<sup>25</sup> John Morley, *Diderot and the Encyclopædists*, I, pp. 228-233. The articles "Philosophe" and "Philosophie," amusingly criticized in the same work, pp. 224-227,

bert. For Malebranche, Diderot once more laid Fontenelle's *Eloges* under contribution, for Brucker had himself used them in writing his book.

A curious instance of the way in which Diderot drew from foreign sources, particularly from English publications, even the information which he might as well have gathered from French books, is supplied by his article on the "Zend Avesta." The French Orientalist Anquetil du Perron, on his return from long travels and studies in India, where he had sojourned from 1755 to 1762, had read before the Academy of Sciences in Paris (May 1762) an account of his voyage and a review of the works attributed to Zoroaster, copies of which he had brought back to be deposited in the King of France's Library. This paper, translated into English, was inserted in the *Annual Register* which the Dodsleys had begun to issue in 1758 (*Ann. Reg.*, vol. V, 1762, Part II, pp. 101—exemplify the usual alliance, which sometimes turns into a conflict, between Diderot's propensity to speak his own mind and his habit of borrowing material on questions that may prove "dangerous." His abstract from Wolf on Philosophy does not seem to come from Brucker.

127). Diderot retranslated this document from the English, only adding a more enthusiastic note to the praises given by the English reviewer to Anquetil's devotion to science, and loyally acknowledging his debt to the *Annual Register*. This periodical, with its very miscellaneous information, the natural curiosities and the practical ideas which it collected, must have been a favorite with Diderot. It is not improbable that some years later it was not foreign to the composition of Diderot's *Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage*.

On the whole, Diderot's indebtedness to foreign works in the *Encyclopédie* seems to be much greater than is commonly supposed. If one takes up the volumes of his *Œuvres complètes* in which the late Assézat has collected his main encyclopedic articles, one will be surprised to notice how large a share they contain of borrowed material and mere translations.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Only in the letter A of the *Encyclopédie*, "Abiens," "Abstinence des Pythagoriciens," "Asiatiques," "Azabe-Kaberi," "Azarecah," are from Brucker; "Acridophages," "Adultère," and other articles mentioned above, are from Chambers; "Aius Locutius" from Zedler; etc.

But there is nothing new or startling in this. It would be comparatively an easy task, and not so long as it appears, were it not beyond the purpose of this book, to trace similar borrowings from Diderot's originals to their predecessors, for instance from Brucker to Fontenelle, Bayle, etc., or from Chambers to the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*, which in its turn had copied Moréri's posthumous edition by Basnage, Harris's *Lexicum*, and other dictionaries. The torch of encyclopedic knowledge had passed from man to man and from country to country for many years before Diderot took it up, and there is no doubt that it was considered more or less as common property, except by malignant critics. What would modern readers think if part of the *Grande Encyclopédie* was translated without acknowledgment from the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, or if articles in the last *Chambers's Encyclopædia* were copied word for word from the *Dictionnaire Larousse*? However strange this practice of wholesale borrowing may appear to us to-day, it must have been natural in the early age of encyclopedia-writing.

In the case of Diderot, several other reasons

explain this conduct. He was, as we have already noted, inclined to borrow one, two, or more pages, when he thought them interesting, in order to weave them with his own disquisitions, with or without acknowledgment. On topics which were of little or no interest to him, like systematic philosophy, or questions which required an orthodox treatment, he willingly relied on someone else's authority. Lastly, the great haste and the secrecy with which the main part of the *Encyclopédie* had to be written, especially after the desertion of D'Alembert and of many contributors, the urgent necessity of completing in a short time a work for which the subscribers had paid in advance, and in which the fortunes of several booksellers were involved, compelled him to finish almost alone a task which to-day requires the work of hundreds of scholars and scientists. Then, in the last ten volumes which came out all together in 1765, Diderot discovered that Lebreton had cut out the boldest parts of many articles, and it is a safe surmise that these parts were in the majority of cases Diderot's original share in the articles. It is indeed unfortunate for him that

what is generally known as his contribution to the *Encyclopédie*, whether in the original text or in later reprints, is the least personal part of his encyclopedic work.

His original work, on which he looked with some degree of pride, in that vast compilation which as a whole appeared to him a very unsatisfactory book, is of a twofold nature. It consists of the philosophic propaganda, "designed to change the general manner of thinking," and the description of the trades. The reforming spirit, characteristic both of the age and the writer, brought about persecutions, but ensured a European popularity and a far-reaching influence to the *Encyclopédie*; it placed it in a class apart from all other dictionaries and encyclopedias, except Bayle's *Dictionary*. The department of practical knowledge, the popularization of the secrets of the arts, sciences, and trades, is more in conformity with the modern conception of encyclopedias, and it may be said to be altogether Diderot's own, for he was the first to make technical information rank higher in importance than mere erudition. Thus the practical part of his work,

though obsolete in matter to-day, is altogether modern in its conception; and the polemical part, which has no equivalent in later encyclopedias, will remain representative of the progressive intelligence of an enlightened age.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE DRAMATIST

TOWARDS the end of his life, after he had seen the last volume of Supplements and the last volume of Plates of the *Encyclopédie* through the press, Diderot made a melancholy reflection, in the course of his *Réfutation du livre d'Helvétius intitulé L'Homme* (1773-1774): "Chance, and even more the necessities of life, dispose of us as they please; who knows this better than I do? This is the reason why, for some thirty years, I have against my taste made the *Encyclopédie*, and written only two plays" (II, 312).

He elsewhere remembers the needy years of his youth, when he managed to go to the theatre regularly (VII, 401), and when we may presume that, like his friend Rousseau about the same time, he dreamt of forcing open the gates of fame by the short and uneasy way of dramatic triumphs. While translating Temple Stanyan and Robert James for money, he must



have begun to sketch plays. He had even thought of becoming an actor, and he tells us that for a time he had trained himself for that profession, reciting passages from Corneille and Molière along the lonely walks of the Jardin du Luxembourg, even on the coldest days (VIII, 398). But it was not possible for Diderot to become interested in anything without first subjecting it to criticism and framing it all anew to his satisfaction. Thus an account of Diderot as a dramatist must deal more with theory than practice, with suggestions than achievements.

No other part of Diderot's writings has given rise to a larger mass of studies and criticisms than his plays and his essays concerning dramatic literature. The great interest which they have excited in European literature is due to two main facts: the novelty of their embodiment in one doctrine or system, which was singularly in advance of the eighteenth-century French dramaturgy; and the relation which they bear to the theory and practice of the stage in England, before Diderot, and in Germany, after him. We shall of course be concerned not so much with the echoes which Diderot's ideas

found abroad, particularly beyond the Rhine, as with the inspirations and examples which he received from the other side of the Channel.

In the *Bijoux Indiscrets* (Chap. 38, "Entretien sur les lettres"), Diderot had, somewhat after the manner of Dryden in his *Essay on Dramatic Poetry* (1668), discussed in dialogue form three great topics of criticism: the comparative merits of the ancient and the modern writers; nature and the rules; the conventions of dramatic writing and acting. The first of these questions was already rather worn out in Diderot's age; so he quickly dismissed it, satisfied with a free imitation of Swift's *Battle of the Books* (Chap. 39, "Rêve de Mirzoza") and a fling at the race of critics (p. 296). The other two topics, namely, the everlasting question of nature and art, and the deficiencies of the French classical stage, were going to exercise Diderot's critical faculty for many years. Starting from the old principle that only the true can please and move, and from the mistaken notion that the perfection of a play consists in imitating an action with such accuracy that the spectator is deceived throughout and fancies that he witnesses the action itself, Diderot blamed the com-

plication and rush of French tragedies, the rant or wit of their dialogues, the artificial nature of their dénouements.

"And then," Diderot added, "did anyone ever talk as we recite? Do princes and kings walk otherwise than a man who walks well? Have they ever gesticulated as though they were possessed or raving mad? Do princesses utter sharp hisses while they talk?<sup>1</sup> People say that we have carried tragedy to a high degree of perfection; and I consider it a demonstrated fact that, of all genres of literature to which (the French) have applied themselves in the last centuries, this is the most imperfect" (IV, 283-286).

In the *Letter on the Deaf and Dumb* (1751), Diderot tells us of an experiment which he used to make in order to ascertain how far the players acted in conformity with the parts they held: as he knew the words of the plays by heart, he would stop his ears with his fingers, watch the gestures of the performers, and only listen when he was misled and confused by their action. "Ah! Sir," he concludes, "how few

<sup>1</sup> See Molière's satirical description of the fashionable way of playing French tragedy, as practised at a rival theatre, the Hôtel de Bourgogne, in *Impromptu de Versailles*, sc. 1.

players were able to stand such a trial!" (I, 359). Of the player's art he would have said what the ancient orator said of the art of eloquence, that the quality most to be prized in public speaking was action; the next, action; and the next, action.

Action, Diderot thought, was in some cases superior to the highest reaches of eloquence or poetry.

"There are some sublime gestures which all the resources of oratory shall never express. Such is the gesture of Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare's tragedy. Walking in her sleep, she comes forward in silence (Act V, sc. 1) on the stage, her eyes closed, imitating the action of a person who washes her hands, as if hers were still stained with the blood of her king, whom she had murdered twenty years before. I know of nothing in discourse more pathetic than the silence of that woman and the motion of her hands. What a picture of remorse!" (I, 254-255).

To Voltaire, who, as Gibbon tells us, adhered to the artificial mannerisms of performance which were the tradition of the French stage, Diderot wrote, Nov. 28, 1760, after the presentation of *Tancrède*:

"Ah! my dear master, if you could see Clairon passing across the stage, half fainting in the arms of the executioners who surround her, her knees bending under her, her eyes closed, her arms falling stiff by her side, as though she was dead; if you heard the cry that she utters when she perceives Tancrède, you would remain more convinced than ever that silence and pantomime sometimes have a pathos to which all the resources of oratory can never attain" (XIX, 457).

This early taste of Diderot for theorizing about the dramatic art, that is, the art of the actor as well as that of the playwright, might have produced nothing but treatises and plans of reforms. Yet it was not likely that he would refrain from trying his personal skill in writing, if not in performing, plays, while thus finding fault with the traditional *répertoire* and art of acting. It is not very easy to determine exactly when he began to write plays. Rosenkranz finds no evidence that Diderot wrote for the stage before 1757, but endeavors to ascribe to him a drama entitled *L'Humanité, triste drame, par un aveugle tartare*,<sup>2</sup> possibly written

<sup>2</sup> Karl Rosenkranz, *Diderot's Leben und Werke*, Leipzig, 1866, vol. I, p. 268; he developed this point in

in 1749, but first published in an unauthorized edition of Diderot's works in 1773. This is not at all probable. Diderot's first dramatic attempt was *Le Fils Naturel*, but he was several years writing it, probably because the *Encyclopédie* left him but very little time for this kind of work. In an unpublished letter of Diderot to an obscure fellow-playwright, Antoine Bret, we have a proof that as early as 1753, and probably for a year or two before that, Diderot had been engaged in writing at least two plays; the one which he discusses with Bret seems to be *Le Fils Naturel*, which has an incident in common with one of Bret's plays, *Le Jaloux*, that was never performed.<sup>3</sup> Diderot probably also wrote at a comparatively early date some of the dramatic sketches now included in his works, and never had time or the inclination to develop them into plays. For instance his sketch entitled *Le Shérif*, the plot of which is similar to that of *Measure for Measure*, yet without any trace of a Shakespearean influence, is said by

Gosche's *Jahrbuch der Literaturgeschichte*, vol. I. See Assézat's discussion of the same point in *Œuv.*, VII, 5 ff.

<sup>3</sup> This letter will be found at the end of the present work, Appendix I.

Grimm (Dec. 1, 1769) to have been contemplated more than twelve years earlier, that is to say before 1757.

It was only in 1757, however, that Diderot published *Le Fils Naturel ou les épreuves de la vertu*, a comedy written in prose, in five acts; it was performed without success in 1771. To this play were appended some dialogues concerning dramatic theory, entitled *Entretiens sur Le Fils Naturel: Dorval et moi*. In 1758 he published *Le Père de famille*, also a prose comedy in five acts, with a *Discours sur la poésie dramatique*; the play met with considerable success when it was acted in 1761 and 1769.

"Diderot's theatre," it has been rightly said,<sup>4</sup> "is now for us nothing but a commentary on his theories." As a matter of fact, his theories were partly intended as a commentary and defence of his plays. His unlucky efforts in play-writing have been very severely dealt with by critics, more particularly by French critics; and indeed it is difficult to vindicate his

<sup>4</sup>J. Texte, Introduction to *Extraits de Diderot*, Paris, 4th edition, 1909, p. lv.

performances. But it would be unjust to deny that in dramatic theory he showed originality.<sup>5</sup> Between 1750 and 1758, from two independent movements which tended, in France and in England, to substitute a new dramatic genre for the classical tragedy and comedy of the French seventeenth century, he succeeded in organizing for the first time into one dramatic system elements which before him had been more or less scattered and disconnected. It is true that he was naturally inclined to consider as great novelties, nay, as his own discoveries, ideas which had already been expressed by someone else; but was it not because he had, according to his custom, harbored those ideas long enough in his mind to make them fructify, and discovered some latent wealth or new values in them which their originators themselves had failed to perceive? There was no need for him to give to any of his predecessors the credit of the philosophic generalizations which he had been the

<sup>5</sup> This negative view is to be found in F. Brunetière, *Evolution des genres*, Paris, 1892 (2d edition), vol. I, pp. 152 ff.; also in Ernest Bernbaum, in an unpublished thesis, Harvard University, on *Sentimental and Domestic Drama in England and France*, 1906.



first to make. Yet, while he claimed that he was about to renovate all dramatic literature, he was more eager than even his critics have been to point to precedents and confirmations of his theories in the theatre of the French, the English, and even the ancients.

In or about the year 1753, as he tells us,<sup>6</sup> Diderot, then forty years old, endeavored to frame for himself some philosophic notions concerning what we call the true, the good, and the beautiful. We have already seen how some years before he had begun to shape a system of positive ethics under the influence of Shaftesbury, and to define, after Francis Bacon, the method by which scientific truth could be discovered. In both cases he had been emboldened, by English precedents as well as by the natural bent of his analytic mind, to criticize and reject the traditional elements preserved in religion and in metaphysical systems. Concerning the beautiful, we shall see in a subsequent chapter<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> VII, 390, the monologue of Ariste the philosopher (that is, Diderot) on the fundamental nature of our ideas of the true, the good, the beautiful, nature, taste, etc.

<sup>7</sup> Chapter VIII, *The Critic*.

what results he attained in his philosophic inquiry and to what extent those results affected his criticism of art and literature. In the particular theory of dramatic literature, which had early interested him, he proceeded in the same positive spirit as in ethics and in science: he found tradition insufficient, narrow, and artificial; he called for truth, nature, and morality, saw the possibility of a complete transformation of the stage, and looked for confirmations of his ideas in the examples of some independent playwrights at home and abroad. This connection between the dramatic theories and the general philosophic message of Diderot should be borne in mind, because it accounts for and justifies his belief in the originality of his system.

Considered in this light, his dramatic system is primarily a reaction against tradition, and a philosophic attempt to forecast the future of dramatic literature, to outline the probable path of its development, at a time when the classical edifice of conventional rules appeared to be tottering to its fall. The substitution of a new dramatic ideal for the old naturally carried as

its corollary a reformation of the art of acting. Now, what was Diderot's relation to the general movement which had already begun in France and England towards the creation of a more "natural," that is more realistic, kind of dramatic literature than that of the classical age of France? What British dramatists did he extol as good models and worthy guides? And to what extent was he influenced by his friend Garrick in his philosophy of the art of acting?

The reaction against the classical or pseudo-classical tradition, in the history of which Diderot was to occupy a prominent place, may be said to have had two distinct aspects before he came, in France and in England. In France, the growth of sentiment, *la sensibilité*, had affected the general character of comedy, causing it to become less satirical than it had been with Molière and Regnard, and to deal more with emotion and sentiment, with Destouches, Marivaux, and La Chaussée, until it received the paradoxical name of "tearful comedy," *la comédie larmoyante*.<sup>8</sup> In England, meanwhile,

\* See M. G. Lanson's *Nivelle de la Chaussée et la comédie larmoyante*, Paris, 1887 (2d edition, 1903). If in what follows we seem to claim for Diderot some of

the increasing importance of the middle-class in the affairs of the nation and the consequent tendency of literature to become more democratic operated in conjunction with certain literary movements, like the reaction against the influence of French classicism, the moralization of the stage, and the return to Elizabethan models, to produce a sort of tragedy of the middle-class, *la tragédie bourgeoise*. A common feature of both the French and the English movement, as of most new departures in literary history, was a wish to "return to nature," or rather to "return to truth," truth being understood as a close imitation of the reality that is nearest the audience. Were not mild emotions nearer reality, in an age of sentiment, than a satirical spirit castigating vice through ridicule? And were not the misfortunes of common people, in a democratic age, nearer the truth of life than the catastrophes which had befallen heroes and kings in mythology or history?

The common element which is to be found in the credit which M. Lanson gives to La Chaussée as a dramatic reformer, it is because Diderot summed up in his system what had been done before him abroad as well as in France, and exerted a wider influence.

the evolution of the French and the English stage during the early part of the eighteenth century, the analogy which the two movements bore to each other by their common tendency to depart from a certain dramatic tradition in order to give a more faithful representation of human actions, is obvious and was very early perceived. It may have obscured the essential difference which separated the French and the English effort to disintegrate the neoclassical tradition: the French dramatists made innovations in comedy only, for Voltaire had as it were monopolized the tragic stage, and would not hear of a "tragédie bourgeoise"; the English, by a return to the Elizabethan tradition, produced examples of this middle-class tragedy which in the latter part of the century gave rise to the Drama. Two other considerations have contributed to introduce some confusion into this question: in the first place, the protest against the so-called Aristotelian rule<sup>9</sup> which admitted of no common or mean characters and actions on the tragic stage had early been voiced in France by no less a playwright than Cor-

<sup>9</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, Chap. XIII.

neille;<sup>10</sup> and, in the second place, the English stage, in the first two decades of the century, had produced some *moral* comedies, which had to some extent influenced the plays of Des-

<sup>10</sup> Corneille, *Don Sanche d'Aragon*, Epître dédicatoire à Monsieur de Zuylichem, had given in substance what Lillo, Diderot, and Beaumarchais later proclaimed: "Je dirai plus . . . : la tragédie doit exciter de la pitié et de la crainte, et cela est de ses parties essentielles, puisqu'il entre dans sa définition. Or, s'il est vrai que ce dernier sentiment ne s'excite en nous par sa représentation que quand nous voyons souffrir nos semblables, et que leurs infortunes nous en font appréhender de pareilles, n'est-il pas vrai aussi qu'il y pourrait être excité plus fortement par la vue des malheurs arrivés aux personnes de notre condition, à qui nous ressemblons tout à fait, que par l'image de ceux qui font trébucher de leurs trônes les plus grands monarques, avec qui nous n'avons aucun rapport qu'en tant que nous sommes susceptibles des passions qui les ont jetés dans ce précipice; ce qui ne se rencontre pas toujours?" . . . "Et certes, après avoir lu dans Aristote que la tragédie est une imitation des actions, et non pas des personnages, je pense avoir quelque droit . . . de prendre pour maxime que c'est par la seule considération des actions, sans aucun égard aux personnages, qu'on doit déterminer de quelle espèce est un poème dramatique."

To be sure, even though Corneille does not think of "bourgeois" here, his thesis seems rather novel and paradoxical to himself, and he adds: "Si vous ne me pouvez accorder la gloire d'avoir assez appuyé une nouveauté, vous me laisserez du moins celle d'avoir passablement défendu un paradoxe."

touches;<sup>11</sup> so that it has seemed allowable to trace the origin of the "tragédie bourgeoise" in French literature, and the first beginnings of sentimental comedy in English literature. But it remains true that neither Corneille nor any French dramatist after him had dared to introduce mere "bourgeois" as protagonists in a tragedy, and that, on the other hand, although the moral tone of English comedy had been raised by Colley Cibber and Steele under the influence of Jeremy Collier's pamphlet and of the general sense of propriety which began to prevail in the age of Addison, the aim of the English reformers had never been to replace the comic by the pathetic emotions, that is, professedly to write sentimental comedy.

Thus, when Diderot began to write for the stage, the traditional *séparation des genres*, the distinction rigidly kept by the French classicists between the comic and the tragic, was very seriously threatened in France by the admixture of sentimental and moral elements in comedy. Not that the "monstrous" Shake-

<sup>11</sup> E. Bernbaum, *op. cit.*, has attempted to prove that Destouches is the originator of sentimental comedy in France.

spearean alliance of laughter and tears, of clowns and kings, had had any influence as yet: Voltaire had condemned it, it was abhorrent to all polished taste in England as well as in France, and the Romantic theory concerning the reflected beauties of "the sublime and the grotesque" was still far from all minds. But comedy was no longer essentially comic; and, for those who, like Diderot, looked to England for novelties of every kind, tragedy ceased to appear necessarily confined to kings, legendary heroes, saints, or historical characters. Some English writers, feeling more at ease than Corneille in forsaking the "tragedia cothurnata, fitting kings," because they lacked no precedents in the dramatic tradition of their country, had taken tragic plots from real life, and characters from among "people of our own condition." Otway's *Orphan* (1680) was a sort of domestic tragedy said to be related to a fact; Rowe's *Fair Penitent* (1703) had staged "a melancholy tale of private woes" which owed something to *The Fatal Dowry* of Massinger and Field; and Southerne's *Fatal Marriage or the Innocent Adultery* (1694) had treated the



ancient theme which Tennyson later resumed in *Enoch Arden*.<sup>12</sup> These in turn served as precedents to the two English dramatists who, in Diderot's lifetime, again dared to invade the tragic stage with "moral tales from private life"; but Diderot gave them all the credit of the bold innovation, and established the belief that the originators of domestic tragedy were George Lillo, in *The London Merchant*, and Edward Moore, in *The Gamester*.

The play of George Lillo entitled *The London Merchant, or The History of George Barnwell*, derived from a real story preserved in a popular ballad, had been performed with great success in London in 1731. Translated into French by Pierre Clément in 1748, it had a second edition in Paris in 1751, and in 1755 was incorporated in the *Théâtre bourgeois*. From the Dedication of *The London Merchant*, it appears that Lillo was conscious of the comparative novelty of his attempt in England:

"Tragedy," he wrote, "is so far from losing its dignity, by being accommodated to the cir-

<sup>12</sup> See A. H. Thorndike, *Tragedy*, 1908, pp. 271, 274, 285; and pp. 316-319 for what concerns Lillo and Moore.

cumstances of the generality of mankind, that it is more truly august in proportion to the extent of its influence, and the numbers that are properly affected by it. As it is more truly great to be the instrument of good to many, who stand in need of our assistance, than to a very small part of that number.

"If princes, etc., were alone liable to misfortunes, arising from vice, or weaknesses in themselves or others, there would be good reason for confining the characters in tragedy to those of superior rank; but, since the contrary is evident, nothing can be more reasonable than to proportion the remedy to the disease."<sup>13</sup>

If the traditional kind of tragedy has proved effectual in fulfilling that moral function which for Lillo is the main utility of dramatic performances, why should we hesitate to make its field wider?

"I have attempted, indeed, to enlarge the province of the graver kind of poetry, and should be glad to see it carried on by some abler hand. Plays founded on moral tales in private life may be of admirable use, by carrying conviction to the mind with such irresistible force as to engage all the faculties and powers of the soul

<sup>13</sup> We quote from A. W. Ward's excellent edition of Lillo's *London Merchant* and *Fatal Curiosity*, Belles-Lettres Series, 1906.

in the cause of virtue, by stifling vice in its first principles."

With this laudable end in view, Lillo was the first dramatist who made "a London 'Prentice" his hero since the distant time when Heywood had turned four apprentices into heroes of chivalry and been ridiculed for it in Beaumont and Fletcher's *Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1611); but he knew that he had been preceded in the field of domestic tragedy by more recent playwrights, and he mentioned them in the Prologue to *The London Merchant*, which gives in abstract both the manifesto and the history of the *tragédie bourgeoise*:

"The Tragick Muse, sublime, delights to show  
Princes distrest and scenes of royal woe;  
In awful pomp, majestick, to relate  
The fall of nations or some hero's fate;  
That scepter'd chiefs may by example know  
The strange vicissitude of things below:  
What dangers on security attend;  
How pride and cruelty in ruin end;  
Hence Providence supream to know, and own  
Humanity adds glory to a throne.

In ev'ry former age and foreign tongue  
With native grandure thus the Goddess sung.  
Upon our stage indeed, with wish'd success,  
You've sometimes seen her in a humbler dress—  
Great only in distress. When she complains  
In *Southern's*, *Rowe's* or *Otway's* moving strains,

The brilliant drops that fall from each bright eye  
 The absent pomp with brighter gems supply.  
 Forgive us then, if we attempt to show,  
 In artless strains, a tale of private woe." Etc.<sup>14</sup>

The venerable belief that art is subservient to morality, that poetic ornaments serve as a sweet coating for the bitter pill of the moral lesson, or as honey on the edge of the cup filled with a wholesome but unpalatable draught, had never been expressed with a stronger conviction than it is in the Dedication and the Prologue of *The London Merchant*, not even by that other "London merchant," Samuel Richardson. This seems to have impressed Diderot greatly. Already imbued through Shaftesbury with the idea of a close relationship between the good and the beautiful, confirmed in the notion that art should develop the principles of virtue by his worship for the virtuous Richardson, he was quite ready to initiate another worship (the natural form of his admiration) for George Lillo. In his treatise *On Dramatic Poetry*,<sup>15</sup> we find him indiscriminately mingling in his praise Corneille's *Cinna*, Racine's *Phèdre*, the episode of Clementina in *Grandison*, and scenes

<sup>14</sup> *The London Merchant*, A. W. Ward edition, pp. 8-9.

<sup>15</sup> Section xvii, *Du Ton*; *Œuv.*, VII, 365.

from *The London Merchant*, for their excellence in the subtle connections of the dialogue with the psychology of the characters. Take the farewell scene between Barnwell and his friend, he exclaims:

“‘*Barnwell*.—So far was I lost to goodness, so devoted to the author of my ruin, that, had she insisted on my murdering thee, I think I shou’d have done it.

“‘*Trueman*.—Prithee, aggravate thy faults no more!

“‘*Barn*.—I think I shou’d! Thus, good and generous as you are, I shou’d have murder’d you!

“‘*True*.—We have not yet embrac’d, and may be interrupted. Come to my arms!’<sup>16</sup>

“We have not yet embraced: what a reply to, I should have murdered you! If I had a son who felt no connection here, I should prefer him never to have been born. Yes, I should feel a greater aversion towards him than towards Barnwell, the murderer of his uncle.”

Elsewhere, in a review of a poem entitled *Lettre de Barnevelt dans sa prison* (1764) by Dorat, Diderot praised Lillo at the expense of his imitator, and, returning once more to the wonderful “Let us embrace,” he said whim-

<sup>16</sup> *The London Merchant*, Act I, sc. 5 (A. W. Ward, p. 98). Diderot’s rendering of this passage is free.

sically: "I advise the man whose heart is not torn by these words to go and be thrown again by Deucalion and Pyrrha over their shoulders; for he has remained a stone" (VIII, 449).

He charged his contemporaries to share his unbounded admiration: "Confess that *The London Merchant* is a sublime thing!" To those who timidly objected "decency, propriety," he retorted by comparing the English drama with Greek tragedy, the despair of Millwood and Barnwell's tears of repentance with the frantic outcries of Philoctetes in Sophocles (VII, 95).

His zealous propaganda bore some fruit. Dorat's epistle has just been mentioned; Anseaume in 1765 wrote a comic opera entitled *L'Ecole de la jeunesse ou le Barnevelt français*,—this Dutch name seemed more harmonious to French ears than "Barnwell"; Sébastien Mercier in 1769 gave *Jenneval ou le Barnevelt français*; and in 1778 La Harpe printed a *Barnevelt* in the first volume of his *Théâtre*, which was Lillo's play attenuated and revised according to the canons of classical taste.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> On these imitations, see F. Gaiffe, *Le Drame en France au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, 1910, pp. 73-74.

The other English play in which Diderot found a germ of the "new poetics" that he was seeking, Edward Moore's *Gamester*, was more recent than *The London Merchant*: it had been performed at Drury Lane in 1753, and published in the same year. Diderot, in his *Conversations with Dorval* (1757), gave it as an excellent example of domestic tragedy; having no doubt praised it enthusiastically in conversation, he was urged by his friends to translate it and submit it to the Comédie Française for performance.<sup>18</sup> His translation, written in 1760, was neither played nor printed in his lifetime; it was published for the first time in 1819. But *The Gamester* was soon offered to the French public in another translation, by the Abbé Bruté de Loirelle (1762), and in a poor imitation by Saurin, entitled *Beverley* (1768), which was successful on the stage. Even the mathematician D'Alembert was interested in this English drama, and translated the soliloquy of Beverley in his prison, of course with the

<sup>18</sup> "They all want me to translate *The Gamester*, and give it to the Théâtre Français" (To Mlle Volland, Sept. 5, 1760; *Œuv.*, XVIII, 448, 451, 461.) *Le Joueur, drame*, will be found in *Œuv.*, VII, 417-525.

alterations which French "taste" called for.<sup>19</sup>

A short comparison between the original *Gamester* and Diderot's *Le Joueur* is instructive, and to some extent entertaining. *Le Joueur* is a free translation, sometimes a mere paraphrase, especially in the passages which express violent emotions: here Diderot, who as a rule preserves the general tone of his original rather faithfully, almost always emphasizes the exclamations, lamentations, apostrophes to Heaven, *les cris*, as he would have said, which marked the more pathetic situations.<sup>20</sup> The philosopher and the man of sentiment also appears at times, to develop what Moore's rhythmic prose had briefly expressed; so that it becomes difficult for the reader to discern what may have been written by the author of *The Gamester* and what by the author of *Le Père de famille*:

"*Madame Beverley* [who had just unmasked her husband's wicked friend Stukely].—And there is a Heaven! a God! an avenger of crime! a place destined for the wicked! and the earth

<sup>19</sup> Assézat, in Diderot's *Œuv.*, VII, 413–415.

<sup>20</sup> See for instance the scene of Beverley's arrest (*Joueur*, Acte V, sc. 1, p. 503;—*Gamester*, 1753 edition, p. 67). Diderot preserved the exact order of the dialogue, but divided the acts into scenes after the French fashion.



does not gape open! O God! Thou wishest him to be abandoned to his own heart; I consent: Thou allowest him time; Thou wishest, before consummating his loss through hard-heartedness, to let him appease Thy wrath by his repentance. I subscribe to Thy will." [*Re-enter Lucy.*]

"Lucy, follow me. Come, child, come and hear the wretchedness of thy poor mistress, and mingle thy tears with hers. Come; yet know, and do not forget, that good and evil come from above; that God has not turned His face away even from him who suffers undeservedly, that He sometimes strikes with most violence the one whom He most loves; and that whether He gives affliction or prosperity, He always gives rewards."<sup>21</sup>

In this *tirade*, which to English ears would have had the familiar sound of a sermon, Diderot unconsciously violated that "propriety"

<sup>21</sup> Thus Diderot (VII, 481), while the original is much simpler (*Gamester*, 1753, p. 50): "*Mrs Bev.*—Why opens not the Earth to swallow such a Monster? Be Conscience then his Punisher, 'till Heaven in mercy gives him Penitence, or dooms him in his Justice. [*Re-enter Lucy.*] Come to my Chamber, *Lucy*; I have a Tale to tell thee, shall make thee weep for thy poor Mistress.

Yet Heav'n the guiltless Sufferer regards,  
And when it most afflicts, it most rewards.

[*Exeunt.*]"

commonly observed on the British stage which excludes references to God by name. On the other hand, the French literary "bienséances" were respected. This sentence of Moore's, for instance, referring to Beverley in his prison: "The bleak Winds perhaps blowing upon his pillow!" was deemed intolerable, untranslatable, and was duly replaced by a consecrated *cliché*: "De la paille est son lit, une pierre est son chevet."<sup>22</sup>

Some parts of Diderot's translation reveal a good deal of haste and carelessness, and, one might add, an insufficient knowledge of everyday English. We have seen that, in spite of his reputation for English scholarship, he was more likely to be versed in the language of books than in that of conversation and correspondence. Thus in this translation it sometimes happened that he missed the meaning of a whole sentence and became inextricably involved for having too hastily assumed that one important word in the sentence was familiar to him.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *Gamester*, p. 69; *Joueur*, Acte V, sc. 2 (VII, 505).

<sup>23</sup> See above, Chapter V, p. 268. The two following examples from *Le Joueur* will justify the reservations

In spite of his admiration for *The Gamester*, Diderot conceived that its general effect might be improved by some additions to, or complications of the plot. We are not certain that he suggested to Saurin the awful "tableau" in which the gamester raises a knife over his sleeping children, a dramatic contrivance which contributed a great deal to the success of *Beverley* in Paris. But we know through which we have made concerning Diderot's knowledge of English.—*Gamester*, p. 10: "*Charlotte*.—Cure her, and be a friend then.—*Stukely*. How cure her, Madam?—*Char*. Reclaim my Brother.—*Stu*. Ay; give him a new Creation; or breathe another Soul into him. I'll think on't, Madam. Advice I see is thankless." *Le Joueur*, I, sc. 5: "*Char*. Si vous êtes de ses amis, Monsieur, faites-le voir.—*Stu*. Comment, madame?—*Char*. En ramenant mon frère de son égarement et en le rendant à sa malheureuse épouse.—*Stu*. J'entends, il faut que je refonde mon ami, âme et corps. Ce n'est que cela que vous exigez? J'y penserai, madame. Mais en attendant, vous me permettrez de vous dire que *je ne vois pas, dans le conseil que vous avez la bonté de me donner, de quoi vous remercier* et vous être obligé."

Again, in *Gamester*, p. 53, the confusion of the unfamiliar word "wainscot" with "waistcoat," and an imperfect understanding of the verb "to sit down," produce an absurd result in *Le Joueur*, IV, sc. 3: "*Stu*. Tell me of *Beverly*—How bore he his last Shock?—*Bates*. Like one (so *Dawson* says) whose Senses have been numb'd with Misery. When all was lost, he fixt

Grimm that Stukely's passion for Mrs Beverley, in Saurin's play, was of Diderot's own invention,—an improvement similar to his suggestion of an encounter between Miss Howe and Lovelace in *Clarissa*.<sup>24</sup>

On the whole, however, his appreciation of *The London Merchant* and *The Gamester* was deep, whole-hearted, and unfeigned. He nowhere expressed any criticism against those plays; and whatever corrections he ventured to make were only intended to facilitate their success in a land where taste, according to him, was still

his Eyes upon the Ground, and stood some Time, with folded Arms, stupid and motionless. Then snatching his Sword, that hung against the Wainscot, he sat him down; and with a Look of fixt Attention, drew Figures on the Floor. . . ." Translation: "*Stu.* Mais où est Beverly? . . . où est-il? . . . Et sa dernière catastrophe, comment l'a-t-il soutenue?—*Bates.* Dauson m'a dit, comme un homme abasourdi. Lorsqu'il eut tout perdu, ses yeux s'attachèrent à la terre. Il demeura quelque temps ainsi, les bras croisés sur la poitrine, immobile, stupide. Puis tirant son épée, qui était accrochée à une des boutonnières de sa veste, il se coucha par terre; et les regards distraits, égarés, il se mit à tracer des figures avec la pointe." It seems difficult to ascribe this blunder to mere carelessness, especially in such an important instance of described "pantomime."

<sup>24</sup> See next chapter, p. 342.

absurdly narrow. He wanted to broaden the esthetic notions of art, nature, taste, just as in metaphysics he had called for a broader conception of God: "Elargissez Dieu!" Make art more comprehensive, more tolerant, more universal; do not exclude as vulgar, cheap, contemptible, emotions to which a large number of our fellow-men are responsive. Let the stage no longer be aristocratic, but popular, so that its appeal may be wider. This, as it seemed to him, in his ignorance of the Elizabethan tradition, was what Lillo and Moore, with true English "boldness," had done for the first time since the age of Sophocles.

Boldness, a radical spirit of reform, a thorough-going plan to modernize the stage and rid it of the last patches and shreds of pseudo-Aristotelian criticism, was what playwrights before Diderot had lacked, and what Diderot meant to supply; hence the pompous, oracular tone with which he is sometimes reproached. There had no doubt been, since Corneille, some upholders of the moderns against the ancients, La Motte, Fontenelle, who had pointed to a dramatic ideal different from that of Classicism,

while Destouches, La Chaussée, even Voltaire had departed from tradition with success. But "the theories of La Motte had not resulted in any work likely to live; Fontenelle's comedies had not been performed; and on the other hand the plays which had met with real success on the stage seemed merely to have aimed at pleasing the audience, rather than at the conscious application of a new system of poetics."<sup>25</sup>

But Diderot did not ignore what had been done before him in France to emancipate the stage, and, with all his admiration for the contemporary English dramas, he once went so far as to claim for his country the honor of having initiated domestic tragedy, and the domestic novel as well, innovations of which the English had reaped the glory. This is what he wrote in 1762 concerning the unsuccessful *Sylvie* (1742) of Landois: "This is the first prose tragedy that ever appeared on any stage"—he forgot or did not know that *The London Merchant* had been produced eleven years earlier. "All prejudices are braved together in it; it is in one act;

<sup>25</sup> F. Gaiffe, *Le Drame en France au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. 154. On Destouches, Fontenelle, Marivaux, and their influence, see in the same work pp. 29-30.

it takes place between characters of low degree, and is written in prose; this genre has given birth in England to *The London Merchant* and *The Gamester*; in Germany to *Miss Sara Sampson* and *Clementina*; just as the novels of Monsieur de Marivaux have inspired *Pamela*, *Clarissa*, and *Grandison*. To us belongs the honor of having taken the first steps in those genres. It must be acknowledged that the boldness of the English genius has left us sadly behind. We find things; and while prejudice, criticism, stupidity stifle them among us, the good sense of foreigners seizes them, follows them up, and produces masterpieces and originals."<sup>26</sup> The whole fragment from which this passage is ex-

<sup>26</sup> *Œuv.*, VIII, 439, *Projet d'une Préface* sent to Trudaine de Montigny, who had planned to publish in one volume *Sylvie*, *The London Merchant*, *The Gamester*, and *Miss Sara Sampson*. Diderot's inaccurate assumption that Landois had preceded Lillo in domestic tragedy is less material than his hint of an influence of Marivaux on Richardson. This erroneous idea, founded on some likenesses between the two writers, was echoed by Grimm, Président Hénault, Madame du Bocage, and asserted by Larroumet in his *Marivaux* (Paris, 1882) without sufficient proofs. Austin Dobson, in his *Richardson* (English Men of Letters Series, 1902) has convincingly shown how independent Richardson was of any French influence.

tracted clearly shows how Diderot conceived the historical development of the parallel movements which in France and England seemed about to modernize and democratize the stage, and of which he wished to be the first complete theorist.<sup>27</sup> In spite of the efforts of a conservative, pseudo-classic criticism "to defend good taste, the old rules, the ancient authors, our fathers, our masters, to stifle geniuses at their birth, to prolong by half a century the *ennui* of a nation, to stop art in its progress by idly strengthening its earlier boundaries, to pass to a bolder neighboring people the honor which an inventive nation would have had,"<sup>28</sup> he believed that the time had come for taste to become more tolerant, for the rules and masters to be respectfully set aside, for true pathetic emotions to replace *ennui*, and for new plays to be written after the models of Lillo and Moore.

It would be neither appropriate nor possible to review and criticize here all the dramatic system

<sup>27</sup> F. GaiFFE, *op. cit.*, pp. 153 ff., clearly brings out Diderot's originality in this respect, against those who have been tempted to minimize or deny it.

<sup>28</sup> VIII, 441. The manifestos of Stendhal and Hugo hardly go beyond this.



of Diderot. The *Entretiens sur Le Fils Naturel*, in which he resorts to his favorite mode of exposition, the dialogue, in settings of natural scenery which may be reminiscent of Shaftesbury's *Moralists*, contain much that is intended to explain and defend *Le Fils Naturel*, together with plenty of criticism of the classical tradition of play-writing and acting, and occasional references to models or precedents in England and among the ancients. Diderot claimed that his subject was taken from life and used every possible effort to make his play appear like "a true story." He acknowledged the necessity of observing the three unities, "difficult to keep, but sensible," though he wished for a greater variety of stage-setting and a larger stage. He defined the *tragédie bourgeoise* in prose, as created by Landois, Lillo, and Moore.<sup>29</sup> He

\*After paying homage to the *Sylvie* of Landois, Dorval apostrophizes Voltaire, as the only man whose genius could provide France with the domestic tragedies she lacks, and firmly establish the new genre. "But what will you call that genre?" he asked.—"Domestic, *bourgeoise* tragedy. The English have *The London Merchant* and *The Gamester*, prose tragedies. The tragedies of Shakespeare are half-prose, half-verse. The first poet who made us laugh with prose introduced prose

emphasized the importance of gestures, or "pantomime," against mere discourse, and considered the emotional value of realistic, pictorial effects (*tableaux*) as much greater than that of stage-effects or clap-trap (*coups de théâtre*). Then, in the *Third Dialogue*, he defined his own innovation, which he called the *genre sérieux*, tried to justify it by the example of Terence, and placed it between the comic and the tragic, distinct from both. In his usual fashion, he had acknowledged English masters only to try and improve upon them. The *Fils Naturel*, as well as the *Père de famille*, could not be considered as belonging to tragedy any more than to comedy: hence the new class in-

into comedy. The first who makes us weep with prose will introduce prose into tragedy. . . . Then we shall see, on the stage, natural situations which a certain sense of propriety, inimical to genius and great effects, has proscribed. I shall never be weary of crying to our French people: 'Truth! Nature! The Ancients! Sophocles! Philoctetes!'" (VII, 120).

This passage gave rise to an idea long current in France, that *The Gamester* was by Lillo. Similarly, in Diderot's latest edition, the play entitled *Miss Sara Sampson*, rightly ascribed to Lessing in VIII, 439, n., is described as "an English play" in XIX, 75, n.

vented by Diderot for his two plays.<sup>80</sup> But if the "serious" plays of this new kind are not designed to make the audience either "laugh" or "weep," if they are not to make any appeal to the emotions, it becomes difficult to see how they can be interesting on the stage.

The great aim of these plays, like that of domestic tragedy, according to Diderot, was to give moral instruction,—a very undramatic purpose, to say the least. Whereas in the *Bijoux Indiscrets* Diderot had stated that a good play should tend to give the spectator the greatest possible illusion, he now asserted that the object of a dramatic composition was "to inspire men with love for virtue and abhorrence for vice" (VII, 149). This moral or utilitarian point of view was taken up once more and insisted upon by Diderot in his essay *On Dramatic Poetry*, in which the exposition of his doctrine is less hampered than in the *Entretiens* by

<sup>80</sup> This point is lost sight of by A. Eloesser, *Das Bürgerliche Drama*, p. 63, when, in the course of his excellent discussion of Diderot's reform, he assimilates domestic tragedy with the "genre sérieux." In Diderot's mind (see the beginning of the *Troisième Entretien*) they were very distinct kinds.

apologies *pro domo suâ*. The influences of Shaftesbury, Richardson, and Lillo now combined with the more definite moralizing propensity which Diderot was acquiring in art criticism (his first *Salon* was for the year 1759). "Oh what good would accrue to mankind, if all imitative arts aimed at one common object, and some day concurred with the laws to make us love virtue and hate vice! It belongs to the philosopher to invite them to this: *he* must call on the poet, the painter, the musician, and urgently cry to them: 'Men of genius, to what end have you received gifts from Heaven?' If they hear him, soon the images of debauchery shall no longer cover the walls of our palaces; our voices shall no longer be the organs of crime, and taste and morality shall gain thereby" (VII, 313). This would then be the task of "serious plays"; and Diderot had a rather indistinct vision of a sort of moral drama, later realized on the stage, yet with a good deal of the tragic element, in which such questions as duelling, suicide, and so forth, would be discussed.

In the course of the many precepts intended

for beginners which fill this essay, Diderot decisively condemns the use of versification in the plays to be written about the middle-class, for the middle-class: "I have sometimes wondered if domestic tragedy"—we may add: and comedy, and the drama—"could be written in verse; and, without very well knowing why, I answered to myself, No. . . . Is it that this genre requires a particular style of which I have no notion? Or because the truth of the subject and the intensity of the interest do not admit of a language ruled by symmetry? Or because the condition of the characters is too near our own to allow of regular harmony?" (VII, 332). In this, as in many other parts of his theories concerning the plays of the future, Diderot was right.

To sum up, Diderot's indebtedness to the two English plays which he so sincerely admired, and to which he so often referred the reader in his two main works of dramatic criticism, was quite considerable, though not in any respect very close. Without them, he would no doubt have written *Le Fils Naturel* and *Le Père de famille*, connecting these plays with the new

dramatic tradition created by the *Sylvie* of Landois, the *Cénie* of Madame de Graffigny, and above all the comedies of La Chaussée. But *The London Merchant*, which staged a *fait-divers* in true Elizabethan fashion, and *The Gamester*, which transposed into tragedy a character study which Regnard had treated in a comedy, helped Diderot both to confirm and generalize his theory that everything in life could be made an object of dramatic imitation, and that of all concerns those most like our own would prove most interesting to us. They emboldened him also to invade the hitherto sacred realm of French tragedy, and to ask for the creation in France of a *tragédie bourgeoise* similar to that of England. Although he did not set the example by writing one, but contented himself with a "genre sérieux" which in spite of his assertions lacked dramatic interest, he at least advised, encouraged, and assisted a numerous school of young dramatists to introduce in France that new dramatic species which, for want of a better name, was called the drama.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> F. Gaiffe, in *Le Drame en France au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, has proved that Diderot's theories marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the French stage.

In this new kind of play, destined to become extremely popular, prose alone was to be used ; terrible situations were no longer to be hidden behind the scenes, nor strong emotions suppressed ; the whole performance was to be made as "real" as possible, so as to penetrate the hearts of men with the stern, direct, and very simple morality which reality alone can give.

Critics have blamed Diderot for not foreseeing that he and his English models led the way to the inferior art of the melodrama. But they led the way likewise to some modern dramatic forms which are as free from the cheap means which naturally enough were resorted to at first to move audiences, as from the classical artificiality which in his day produced nothing but *ennui*. Yet, even if the Diderotian reformation of the stage had produced nothing else than more or less crude melodramas, even if it had not been distantly beneficial to the stage in the romantic and in the realistic age, there is reason to doubt whether he would have blushed for his immediate progeny, the *popular* plays. From his philosophic, encyclopedic point of view, the masses with their easy emotions and

their fondness for concrete shows were as interesting as the cultured classes with their finer esthetic standards, and it was high time that the stage should offer to the Mimi Pinsons and the Margots some other sort of play than that which had delighted the Dorimènes and the Arthénices. As the theatre-going public was becoming more vast, there was no harm in making art more social and accessible. Indeed it is a great pity that the popular plays have for so many years been worthless from the literary standpoint; but only a Shakespeare has so far been able to please both the high and the low.


Voltaire never agreed with Diderot concerning the reform of the French stage, but both were at one, and ahead of their time, in their great respect for the profession of acting. Diderot insisted on the moral value of the theatre not only through a philosophic wish to justify it from Puritanic aspersions, to oppose the stage to the pulpit, and to substitute secular for religious morality,<sup>32</sup> but also to vindicate the

<sup>32</sup> See VII, 108-109, and 369, where he goes so far as to suggest that governments might use the power of the stage to assist legislation. In the *Lettres à Mlle Jodin*, he dwelt at length on the idea that the life of an actress need not necessarily be an immoral life.



dignity of the actor's art, long despised by the world and condemned by the Church. He was among the first to assert with emphasis that actors were not merely public amusers, but artists, men of genius. His acquaintance with David Garrick certainly influenced him here to no small extent.

Only, whereas at first he had considered all artists, and particularly the artists of the stage, as exceptionally rich in sentiment, inspiration, or enthusiasm, and more deficient in reflective power than average men, he later reversed his judgment entirely, and, in the *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, demonstrated that the highest genius consisted in possessing the clearest consciousness of one's means of artistic expression. In 1757 and 1758, probably generalizing from what he found in his own temperament, and from a favorite theme of Shaftesbury, he had rather uncritically accepted the more ordinary, obvious conception of genius, what one might call its Romantic designation: "Poets, actors, musicians, painters, singers of the highest order, great dancers, fond lovers, the truly devout people, all that enthusiastic, passionate crowd feels in-



tensely, and reflects little"<sup>33</sup> (VII, 108). In 1770, having analyzed the current notion concerning artists and found it wanting, he promulgated and defended the Realist's definition of genius:<sup>34</sup> he required the actor to have "a great deal of judgment," to be "a cold, tranquil spectator of human nature, possessing therefore much penetration, but no *sensibilité* whatever" (VIII, 345, 347). For why should the actor be different in this respect from the sculptor, the painter, the orator, the musician? It is not in the first inspiration, under the spell of some "fine madness," that they accomplish their best work. The new idea, the "paradox," came on Diderot with such force that, for fuller demon-

<sup>33</sup> Comp. Shaftesbury, *Charact., Moralists* (J. M. Robertson, vol. II, p. 129): "The transports of poets, the sublime of orators, the rapture of musicians, the high strains of the virtuosi—all mere enthusiasm! Even learning itself, the love of arts and curiosities, the spirit of travellers and adventurers, gallantry, war, heroism—all, all enthusiasm!" This is a comment on a part of the *Letter concerning Enthusiasm* (vol. I, p. 38); see also *Miscell. Reflect.* (vol. II, pp. 175-180).

<sup>34</sup> Flaubert will say: "The less you feel a thing, the more apt you are to express it as it is, . . . but you must have the faculty of making yourself feel it." Letter to Mme X., 1852 (*Corresp.*, Charpentier edition, vol. II, p. 82).

stration, he fondly digested it into a dialogue; this work, from internal evidence, appears to have been written in 1773 and revised in 1778. How can this striking change in Diderot's philosophy of the art of acting be accounted for?

It may be considered as conclusively proved that this *volte-face* was due to Diderot's acquaintance with Garrick,<sup>35</sup> in 1763 and 1764. In a *Letter to Madame Riccoboni*, written in defence of some of his statements on acting in the *Discours sur la poésie dramatique*, which that actress had criticized, Diderot had represented Garrick, whom he did not yet know personally, as a model of that "natural" way of acting which he thought French players lacked:

"Here is an anecdote which the Duc de Duras will relate to you much better than I can write it. He was a witness to it. You know by reputation an English actor called Garrick; some people were one day talking in his presence about pantomime, and he held that, even apart from all discourse, there was no effect that could not be expected from it. Being contradicted, he

<sup>35</sup> We think that this was first shown by Mr. F. A. Hedgecock, in *Garrick et ses amis français*, Paris, 1911, pp. 173 ff.

grew warm in the dispute; driven to an extremity, he said to his contradictors, picking up a cushion: 'Gentlemen, I am the father of this child.' Then he opened a window, took his cushion, dandling, kissing, fondling it, and mimicking all the silly little ways of a father who plays with his child; but a moment came when the cushion, or rather the child, slipped from his hands and fell out of the window. Garrick then began to mimic the father's despair. Ask the Duc de Duras what happened. The spectators were struck with such violent consternation and terror that most of them withdrew. Do you believe that Garrick was thinking then whether he was seen in the face or sideways, whether his action was proper or not, whether his gestures were well compassed, his movements in cadence?" (VII, 402).

In 1770, *bestiam mugientem audiverat*, Diderot had seen and heard "the monster himself," and had had another demonstration of the power of pantomime. This is how he spoke of his experience:<sup>86</sup>

\* In his "*Observations* on a pamphlet entitled 'Garrick or the English Actors,' a work containing reflections on the dramatic art, the art of performing and the manner of playing of actors, with historical and critical notes on the various theatres of London and Paris, translated from the English" (by Antonio Fabio Sticotti, actor). This book, published in 1769, was reviewed by Diderot

"I repeat that I shall not be swayed by the man who is beside himself, but by the man who is cool, self-possessed, the master of his own face, voice, actions, movements, and play. Garrick shows his head in a folding-door, and in two seconds I see his face pass quickly from extreme joy to astonishment, from astonishment to sadness, from sadness to dejection, from dejection to despair, and return with the same rapidity from the point where he is to the point whence he had started. Has his soul been able successively to experience all those passions, and, in concert with his face, to go through that sort of gamut? I believe nothing of the sort" (VIII, 352).

Though players are not willing to confess it, they do not act according to nature, but according to art; their gestures, the varied expressions of their faces are all learnt by heart. Could anything more preposterous be imagined than a coordination of several individual sensibilities with a view to a dramatic performance? Garrick had told Diderot that the art of acting Shakespeare had nothing in common with the art of acting Racine (VIII, 344, 364); it was alto-  
in these *Observations*, the first draft of the *Paradox*, for Grimm's *Correspondance Littéraire* (Oct. 1, Nov. 15, 1770).

gether another set of principles. Garrick's great versatility, his ability to impersonate the most opposite characters at a moment's notice, was a proof of the degree of self-consciousness and self-mastery to which he had attained:

"If you asked this celebrated man, who deserves to be made the sole object of a trip to England, as much as all the remains of Rome deserve the trouble of a journey to Italy, if, I say, you asked him for the scene of the Little Baker's Boy, he played it for you; if you asked him at once for the scene of Hamlet, he played it for you, just as ready to weep over the fall of his buns as to follow in the air the path of a dagger" (VIII, 382).

With a profusion of reflections and examples, Diderot proceeded to show that the player did not and could not play from nature, but from an ideal model created by him in his mind. For this he again appealed to "his dear Roscius," as he called Garrick, in a glowing apostrophe:

"I call you for my witness, English Roscius, famous Garrick, you who by the universal consent of all existing nations, are reputed the first actor they have ever known, pay an homage to the truth! Have you not told me that, however strongly you felt, your action would be but feeble, if, for any passion or character you had

to express, you did not know how to rise in thought to the greatness of a Homeric phantom with which you tried to identify yourself? As I objected that it was not after yourself then that you played, confess your answer: did you not acknowledge that you took good care not to do it, and that the only reason for your appearing so wonderful on the stage was, that in the theatre you always showed an imaginary being which was not you?"<sup>87</sup> (VIII, 396).

It is probable that Garrick, while recognizing the necessity of working as a rule from "emotions recollected in a mood of tranquillity," had made some reservations—which should be the corrective part of the *Paradox*—respecting the occasions when the actor is carried away as well as his audience and shares in their illusion.

Thus, as a conclusion of his *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, Diderot had found that "enthusiasm," *la sensibilité*, which he had formerly considered as the living flame which fed souls of genius,

"In this connection Diderot also quotes, p. 421, from a letter in the *St. James' Chronicle*, the English actor Macklin, who, apologizing to the audience for daring to take up the part of Macbeth after Garrick, had said that "the impressions which subjugated the player and made him submissive to the genius and inspiration of the poet were very bad for him." Compare also Dr Johnson's *boutade* to Kemble quoted hereafter (Chapt. VIII, p. 431, n.).

were elements of weakness in the accomplishment of any great work. "The man of sentiment is too much at the mercy of his diaphragm to be a great king, a great politician, a great magistrate, a just man, a deep observer, and consequently a sublime imitator of nature." And he said in the same breath: "Besides, when I pronounced that sensibility was the characteristic of a good soul and a mediocre genius, I made a confession which was rather uncommon, for if Nature ever kneaded a sensitive soul, it was mine" (VIII, 408). There, it will be noticed in passing, was indeed Diderot's great weakness as a dramatist. If he failed in practice, while his theories contained much that was valuable and gave him many disciples in France and abroad, it was because of his exuberant, romantic personality, which constantly burst forth in fits of moralizing and sentiment. His friend the Abbé d'Arnaud told him once that while other dramatists identified themselves with their characters he on the contrary identified all his characters with himself. He imagined them acting as he himself would have done in their plight, crying out, weeping, gesticulating, discoursing, "not minding the audience any more than if it was not there," and sadly



indulging in that most unpathetic of all human moods, self-pity.<sup>38</sup> He lacked objectivity, the gift of Realism in creation, the art of investing personal elements, subjective emotions vividly recollected, with that impersonal aspect which makes them endure. At least he clearly discerned once what his failing was and what his error had been; and there is reason to believe that to this error he acknowledged that his dramatic failures were due.<sup>39</sup> He may possibly have remembered then the praise given in Aristotle's *Poetics* to Homer, whom he was wont to read so religiously: "Homer, deserving of praise for many other things, is especially to be praised because he, alone of all poets, knows what part to take himself. For the poet in his own person should speak as little as may be; for he is not an imitator in speaking himself—*αὐτὸν γὰρ δεῖ τὸν ποιητὴν ἐλάχιστα λέγειν· οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶ κατὰ ταῦτα μιμητής*.—Now, other poets are on the stage themselves throughout, and their imitations are few and rare."

<sup>38</sup> "The less a suffering man complains, the more he touches me," Diderot wrote concerning the much admired group of statuary which in 1766 inspired Lessing's *Laocoon* (*Pensées détachées sur la peinture*, XII, 117).

<sup>39</sup> See, in VII, 311, his frank misgivings about his treatment of *Le Père de famille*.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE NOVELIST

THERE is no reason to doubt that Diderot attached much more importance to his plays than he ever did to his novels. While his two plays were, as one might say, his main publications besides the *Encyclopédie*, and appeared with all the pomp and circumstance of a dramatic manifesto, his novels were published in a straggling manner between 1748 and 1830, some before his death, but the larger number posthumously. Not one among them carried with it any preface, programme, or critical essay—a singular thing for Diderot—and nowhere can any sign be found that the author had any interest in the value or the fate of his attempts in fiction. He very probably believed that as a genre the novel was susceptible of many new and useful developments; but he never digested his thoughts on this subject, as he had done for dramatic literature, in some half-dogmatic, half-apologetic body of doctrine.

There is, however, a fairly close relationship

between Diderot's dramatic theory and his ideas concerning the novel. He was not interested in the ancient form of romance, whether founded on the chivalrous notions of love and honor, as it had been revived in France in the seventeenth century, or on wonder and mystery, as it was being revived by his contemporary Horace Walpole; all this must have seemed as artificial and obsolete to him as classical tragedy. Nor did he seem to believe in the future of the picaresque novel, as he found it for instance in Le Sage and his English followers, Fielding and Smollett, any more than he believed in satirical comedy. If we try to supply, from his appreciations on Richardson, the main features of what he would have considered the ideal of the novel, this form should have essentially been like the drama, realistic, "bourgeois," and moral. In order to conform to "nature," or reality, the characters in a novel should be taken from the middle-class, the setting from modern surroundings, and the incidents from everyday life. To convey the moral instruction which he was inclined to consider as the principal function of art, the novel should deal with some great topics of ethics affecting

all men, such as the duties of parents to their children and of children to their parents, the question of marriage, and whatever pertains to the relations between the sexes.

This realism in character-study and in description, together with an omnipresent moral purpose, he had found in the novels of Samuel Richardson: *Pamela* (1740), *Clarissa Harlowe* (1748), and *Sir Charles Grandison* (1754). These works had early been translated into French by the Abbé Prévost; *Pamela* in 1742, *Clarissa* in 1751, *Grandison* in two parts in 1755 and 1757. *Clarissa* was translated also by Le Tourneur in 1758, and *Grandison* by G. F. Monod in 1756. Prévost had not hesitated to abridge and polish the English original: "I have suppressed or reduced to the common usages of Europe," he wrote in his Preface to *Grandison*, "whatever in the manners of England might be shocking to other nations. It has seemed to me that those traces of the ancient British grossness, to which only the force of habit can still blind the English, would dishonor a book in which politeness must go hand in hand with nobleness and virtue." Many tell-

ing incidents were thus sacrificed as "low," "indecent," "too long and very English," or "revolting."<sup>1</sup> Diderot must have read the novels of Richardson almost as fast as they appeared, while Prévost was engaged in giving those elegant adaptations of them. In a letter to Mlle Volland (Oct. 20, 1760), Diderot writes that *Clarissa* had just been the occasion of heated discussions in the circle of Baron d'Holbach at Grandval:

"Those who despised that work despised it supremely; those who prized it, as excessive in their esteem as the others were in their contempt, looked upon it as one of the highest achievements of the human mind. I have the book: I am very sorry you did not put it in your box. I shall not be satisfied with you or with myself until I have brought you to relish the truth of *Pamela*, *Tom Jones*, *Clarissa*, and *Grandison*" (XVIII, 514).

One year later, Sophie Volland had perused at least *Clarissa Harlowe*, probably in the English original; for we read that she had been greatly moved by the account of Clarissa's funeral, which the French translator had sup-

<sup>1</sup>Quoted in J. Texte, *J.-J. Rousseau . . .*, 1895, pp. 195-197.

pressed out of respect for French taste, and which only appeared in French in 1762, in a *Supplément aux lettres anglaises de Miss Clarisse Harlowe*.

"What you tell me concerning the funeral and the will of Clarissa," Diderot writes, Sept. 17, 1761, "I had also felt; it is but one more proof of the likeness between our souls. Only a little while ago, my eyes filled again with tears. I could no longer read, I arose, and began to grieve, to apostrophize the brother, the sister, the father, the mother, and the uncles, talking aloud, to Damilaville's great amazement, who could not make anything out of my transport and my speech, and asked me what I was after. It is certain that such reading is very unwholesome after meals, and that you do not choose the right time; it is before a walk that one should take up the book. There is not one letter in which two or three moral topics could not be found for discussion" (XIX, 47).

Shortly after, Sophie having probably related to Diderot some good action which she had performed, he replies (Sept. 22, 1761): "Well, there is a good effect of that reading. Now imagine that book disseminated over the whole surface of the earth, and Richardson will thus be the author of a hundred good actions a day.

Imagine that he will do some good to all countries, many centuries after his death." Richardson had died July 4, 1761, a little over two months before this letter was written, and Diderot was already thinking of writing an *Eloge* of him. In this same letter however he suggests how he would have improved the plot of *Clarissa*: had it been left to him, he tells Mlle Volland, he would have contrived to bring Miss Howe and Lovelace face to face, in accordance with some hints given to that effect by Richardson:<sup>2</sup> "That petulant girl does nothing but talk: I should have liked to see her in action. *Clarissa* is a lamb fallen under the teeth of a wolf, she has nothing to protect her but her timidity, penetration, and prudence; Miss Howe would have been a better match for Lovelace. These two would have given each other much to do. . . . If things had happened as I wish, *Clarissa* would have been saved. . . . In order to save her I should not have been sorry to make her friend run a few risks" (XIX, 50). Sophie Volland did not approve of this suggestion, and

<sup>2</sup> See Letters 24 and 34, in vol. III of *Clarissa* (vol. VI of the *Works*), in *The Works of S. Richardson*, with Introd. by Leslie Stephen, 1883, 12 vols.

she certainly was right from the moral as well as from the artistic standpoint: for where would have the pathetic catastrophe been? And what would the novel have gained? A few more of those *risqué* scenes, with their disgusting suggestiveness, in which Richardson, Diderot and their "age of sentiment" delighted, at the expense of a scene of lasting beauty, the tragic end of the heroine.

Meanwhile Sophie Volland, her sisters, and her mother had further discussed Lovelace and agreed that it would indeed be a good thing if all men like him were to be killed. Thereupon Diderot, questioning the right of such executions even in the abstract, undertakes to defend the composite character of Richardson's libertine with great ingenuity (Sept. 28, 1761):

"That man Lovelace has a charming face, which really pleases you as it does everybody, and in your mind you keep an image of him which is truly captivating; his soul has something noble, he has education, knowledge, all agreeable talents, agility, strength, courage; there is nothing base in his wickedness; it is impossible for you to despise him; you prefer to die a Lovelace, by the hand of Captain Morde, than to live a Solmes; in the main, we like



a half-good, half-bad individual better than an indifferent person. We trust our luck or our cleverness to make us foil his wickedness, and we hope to profit on occasion by his goodness. Do you believe that anyone under the heavens could with impunity have dared to make Clarissa suffer a hundredth part of the injuries she receives from Lovelace? It is something to have a persecutor who, while he torments us, protects us against all that surrounds and threatens us. And then, you entertain some presentiment that this man, who hardened his heart so much against another, would have softened towards you" (XIX, 55).

The result of all these discussions concerning the works of Richardson and of the reflections which Diderot had made for some twenty years on the art of the English novelist is embodied in the famous *Eloge de Richardson* which Diderot wrote some time towards the end of 1761, for publication in the *Journal Etranger* (January, 1762), then edited by a great admirer of England, Suard. The unbounded admiration, often rising to a pitch of lyric enthusiasm, which pervades the whole of this piece, may seem unaccountable and paradoxical. But it must be remembered, first, that it was intended as a sort of funeral oration, in which adverse

criticism would have been a little out of place; secondly, that Diderot's natural self was exaggerated, that his normal speech always ran in superlatives, especially when the topic on hand was the "return" of art to nature and to virtue. Thus he threw down his thoughts on paper, "without connection, order, or premeditated design, as they were inspired to him in the tumult of his heart" (V, 212), trying only to express the meaning which the novels of Richardson had for him and which he trusted they would have for posterity.

He admired in Richardson a natural world, characters taken from the middle ranks of society, incidents and passions which are always and everywhere to be found. Richardson sows the germs of virtue in our hearts. He excels in giving voice to the passions and making people of all conditions speak each in his own way. He strengthens the feeling of commiseration for those who suffer. His so-called lengthy style is characteristic of true imitation: for it is by the multitude of common details that illusion is created; his clear vision of reality soars above the "petty taste" of the age. His characters are almost numberless, yet all so alive that the

readers cannot help discussing them as though they were real persons. The immense variety of *nuances* which he uses makes his fiction truer than history; his characters are not exceptional and particular, but human and universal. His art is deep and hidden; Diderot has often read *Clarissa* in order to "train himself," and has forgotten his intention at the twentieth page (V, 221). Liking or disliking the works of Richardson, he concludes, is a good test of a man's inmost nature. "For me, the people who dislike them are judged. Never have I talked about them to any man whom I esteemed, without trembling lest his judgment should not agree with mine. Never have I met anyone who shared my enthusiasm without feeling tempted to hug him in my arms." Two ladies had had to sever their friendship, because one of them could not help laughing at Richardson, whom the other admired; and this latter wrote to Diderot: "I must confess that it is a great curse to feel and think as she does; so great, that I would rather see my daughter die at once in my arms than to know her to be thus cursed. My daughter! . . . Yes, I have thought over it, and do not take it back" (V, 224). Between

the two attitudes which Diderot tells us his contemporaries took towards Richardson, one of supreme contempt, the other of unbounded, "exaggerated" admiration, Diderot unhesitatingly chose the latter. He was conscious of its exaggeration, but, being convinced that the novels of Richardson were excellent both morally and artistically, he thought that exaggeration was no fault in a good cause. As some later critics have been tempted to react rather strongly against the worship of Richardson, it is better here to let Diderot himself speak, and explain his attitude:

"By a *novel*, one had hitherto meant a fabric of chimerical, frivolous events, the perusal of which was dangerous for taste and morals. I should very much like another name to be found for the works of Richardson, which elevate the mind, touch the soul, are inspired throughout with love for the good, and which are also called novels.<sup>3</sup>

"All that Montaigne, Charron, La Rochefoucauld, and Nicole have put in maxims, Richardson has put in action. But a thoughtful mind,

<sup>3</sup> The French word "roman" applies equally well to the two kinds of fiction called in English "novel" and "romance," while the French "nouvelle" is the "short story." This however is not very material for the translation of this passage.

reading the works of Richardson with reflection, makes anew most of the maxims of the moralists, whereas with all those maxims he would not be able to make one page of Richardson.

"A maxim is an abstract, general rule of conduct, the application of which is left to us. By itself, it does not impress any sensible image on our mind: but he who acts is seen, we put ourselves in his place or by his side, we grow excited for or against him; we enter into the part he plays, if he is virtuous; we shun it with indignation, if he is unjust or vicious. Who has not shuddered at the character of a Lovelace or a Tomlinson? Who has not been struck with horror by the pathetic and true tone, the look of candor and dignity, the profound art with which the latter impersonates all virtues? Who has not in his inmost heart said that we should flee from society and take refuge in the depth of the forests if there were a number of such crafty dissemblers?

"O Richardson! in spite of ourselves we must take a part in your works, we mingle in the conversation, we blame, approve, admire, are angry or indignant. How often have I caught myself crying out, as some children have done when they were first taken to a play: 'Do not believe him, he deceives you. . . . If you go there, you are lost.' My soul was in a state of perpetual agitation. How good I was! how just! how well satisfied with myself! After reading you, I was as a man is at the

close of a day devoted by him to doing good. In the space of a few hours, I had traversed a great number of situations, which the longest life hardly offers through the whole of its duration. I had heard the true discourse of the passions; I had seen the mainsprings of interest and self-love play in a hundred different ways; I had become the spectator of a multitude of incidents; I felt that I had gained experience.

“This author does not shed blood beside wainscotted walls; he does not take you into far-distant lands; he does not expose you to the danger of being devoured by savages; he never loses his way into the realms of fairyland. The world where we live is the scene of his action; the matter of his drama is true; his actors have all the reality we may wish for; his characters are taken from the middle ranks of society; his incidents from the manners of all civilized nations; the passions which he depicts are the same that I experience in myself; the same objects inspire them, they have all the power which I know them to possess; the difficulties and afflictions of his characters are of the same kind as constantly threaten me; he shows me the general course of things around me. Without this art, my soul, unwillingly accepting chimerical contrivances, would feel but a momentary illusion, and a weak, transitory impression.

“What is virtue? From whatever point of view we consider it, it is a sacrifice of oneself.

The sacrifice made of oneself in idea predisposes one to self-immolation in reality.

"Richardson sows in our hearts the germs of virtue, which at first remain there idle and dormant: they are hidden there until an occasion comes to make them move and germinate. Then they develop; we feel carried to the accomplishment of good with an eagerness that we did not suspect in ourselves. At the sight of injustice, we experience a revolt for which we cannot account. It is because we have associated with Richardson, because we have conversed with a good man, in moments when the disinterested soul lay open to the truth.

"I still remember the day when the works of Richardson fell into my hands for the first time: I was in the country. What delicious impression that reading made on me! At every passing moment I saw my bliss grow shorter by one page. I soon experienced the same sensation as men would feel who, bound by pleasant intercourse and having long lived together, might be on the point of separation. At the end, it suddenly seemed to me that I had remained all alone. . . .

"He has left me in a state of melancholy which is pleasing and lasting; people sometimes notice it, and ask me: 'What is the matter? You are not your natural self; what has happened to you?' They inquire about my health, my fortune, my relatives, my friends. O my friends! *Pamela*, *Clarissa*, and *Grandi-*

*son* are three great dramas! Torn from that reading by serious occupations, I felt an unconquerable distaste for them; I gave up the task and resumed Richardson's book. Take good care not to open those enchanting works when you have any duties to perform.

"Who has ever read the works of Richardson without wishing to know that man, to have him for a brother or for a friend? Who has not wished him every blessing?

"O Richardson, Richardson, man unique in my eyes, thou shalt be my reading at all times! Compelled by pressing needs, if my friend falls into poverty, if my mediocre fortune does not suffice to give my children the cares necessary for their education, I will sell my books; but thou shalt remain with me, thou shalt remain with me on the same shelf as Moses, Homer, Euripides, and Sophocles, and I will read you by turns. . . .<sup>4</sup>

"I have heard my author reproached for his details, which were taxed with prolixity: how impatient those strictures have made me!

"Woe to the man of genius who oversteps the bounds prescribed by custom and time to the productions of art, and tramples underfoot the protocol and its formulas! Long years

\*It was in 1763, according to Mme de Vandeul, in 1765, according to Meister, that Diderot sold his library to the empress of Russia, in order to provide a dowry for his daughter, who in 1763 was twelve years old. We are not aware that he then reserved this "five-foot shelf."



shall pass after his death before he receives the just treatment he deserves.

"Yet let us be equitable. In the midst of a nation carried away by a thousand distractions, where the day is not sufficient with its twenty-four hours for the amusements with which people have grown accustomed to fill it, Richardson's books must seem long. It is for the same reason that this nation already has no opera left, and that by and by only detached scenes of comedy and tragedy will be performed in its other theatres.

"My dear fellow-citizens, if the novels of Richardson seem long to you, why don't you abridge them? Be consequent with yourselves. You hardly go to the performance of a tragedy except to see the last act. Skip at once to the last twenty pages of *Clarissa*.

"Richardson's details are and cannot but be unpleasant to a frivolous, dissipated man; but he did not write for that man; he wrote for the quiet, solitary man who has known the vanity of the din and the amusements of the world, who loves to dwell in the shade of some retreat and to feel useful emotions in silence.

"You charge Richardson with being prolix! Have you then forgotten how many troubles, cares, pains are required to succeed in the least undertaking, to end a law-suit, make a match, bring about a reconciliation? Think what you like of those details; but they will be interesting to me, if they are true, if they bring out the passions, if they depict the characters.

“You say, ‘They are common; they are what we see every day!’ You are mistaken; they are what takes place every day before your eyes and you never see. Take care: you are attacking the greatest poets under the name of Richardson. A hundred times have you seen the sunset and the stars rising, heard the fields resound with the loud song of birds; but who among you has felt that it was the noise of day which made the silence of night more affecting? Well, it is the same with you for the moral as for the physical phenomena: the outbursts of the passions have often struck your ears; but you are very far from knowing all that is secret in their accents and expressions. Not one of them but has its physiognomy; and all these physiognomies succeed one another on one human face while it still remains the same; and the art of the great poet and the great painter is to show you a fleeting circumstance which had escaped you.

“Painters, poets, men of taste, virtuous men, read Richardson, read him constantly.

“Know that on this multitude of small things the illusion depends: there is much difficulty in imagining them, much more in rendering them. The bodily gesture is sometimes as sublime as the word; and then it is through all this truth in details that the soul becomes prepared for the strong impressions of great events. When your impatience has been suspended by those momentary delays which acted upon it as

a dike, with what impetuosity will it rush forth as soon as it pleases the poet to break them! It is then that, sunken in grief or transported with joy, you will not have the strength to keep back your tears ready to flow, and to say to yourself: 'But perhaps this is not true.' Such a thought had been gradually removed farther and farther from you; and it is so far that it will not occur.

"An idea which sometimes came to me while reading the works of Richardson is, that I had bought an old castle; that, exploring its apartments one day, I had seen in an angle a closet that had not been opened for a long time, and that on bursting it open I had found pell mell some letters of Clarissa and Pamela. After having read a few, how eagerly would I have arranged them according to their dates! How distressed should I have been, if there had been any gap among them! Do you think that I would have suffered a bold (I had almost said, sacrilegious) hand to have suppressed one line?

"You who have only read the works of Richardson in your elegant French translation, and who think that you know them, are mistaken.

"You do not know Lovelace; you do not know Clementina; you do not know the unfortunate Clarissa; you do not know Miss Howe, her dear tender Miss Howe, since you have not seen her dishevelled, prostrate over her friend's coffin, wringing her hands, raising towards heaven her eyes flooded with tears, filling the house of the

Harlowes with her shrieks, and loading with curses all that cruel family; you are ignorant of the effect produced by those circumstances which your petty taste would suppress, since you have not heard the dismal sound of the parish bells, carried by the wind over the dwelling of the Harlowes, and waking remorse which lay slumbering in those stony hearts, since you have not seen how they shuddered on hearing the wheels of the chariot which bore the corpse of their victim. It was then that the mournful silence which reigned in their midst was broken by the sobs of the father and the mother; it was then that the real torture of those wicked souls began, that serpents stirred in the depth of their hearts and tore them. Happy were those who were able to weep! . . .

“Richardson is no more. What a loss for literature and for mankind! This loss has affected me as though he had been my own brother. I carried him in my heart without having seen him, without knowing him otherwise than through his works.

“I have never met one of his countrymen, or one of mine who has traveled to England, without asking: ‘Have you seen the poet Richardson?’ And then: ‘Have you seen the philosopher Hume?’ . . .

“O Richardson! if in thy lifetime thou hast not enjoyed all the reputation that thou didst deserve, how great thou shalt be among our descendants, when they see thee at the distance

from which we view Homer! Then who will dare tear a line out of thy sublime work? Thou hast had more admirers among us than even in thy country; and I am glad of it. Ages, hasten to flow by, and bring with you the honors that are due to Richardson! I call to witness all those who listen to me: I have not awaited the example of other people to pay homage to thee; this very day I was bowed at the foot of thy statue; I worshipped thee, trying to find in the depth of my soul words fitting the extent of my admiration for thee, and I could find none. You who glance over these lines which I wrote without any connection, design, or order, as they were inspired to me in the tumult of my heart, if you have received from heaven a soul more sensitive than mine, erase them. The genius of Richardson has stifled whatever genius I had. His phantoms constantly wander in my imagination; if I want to write, I hear Clementina's complaint; Clarissa's shadow appears; I see Grandison walking before me; Lovelace disturbs me, and my fingers let my pen drop. And you, sweeter apparitions, Emilia, Charlotte, Pamela, dear Miss Howe, while I converse with you, the years of work and the harvest of laurels pass by; and I advance towards my last term, without attempting aught that might commend me also to the ages to come" (V, 212-227).

This eulogy, in which a large element of sin-

cerity is strangely blended with "enthusiasm" and rhetoric, and in which a taste superior to traditional canons is occasionally deceived by an "almost fanatical admiration,"<sup>5</sup> may well give rise to the question whether Diderot was not inspired by Richardson to write some work of fiction that might commend his own name to posterity. For Diderot very willingly imitated whatever he thought worthy of admiration, and, without meaning any disrespect to him, there was much in the good philosopher's character that reminds one of the self-confident and versatile Bottom: "I will play the Lion too!" Indeed, far from stifling his inventive genius, the influence of Richardson seems to have urged him about 1760 to enter a path which he had not yet attempted.

In saying this, we ignore those *Bijoux Indiscrets* of 1748, which are said to have caused their author much shame and regret in later years, as La Fontaine in his old age rued his licentious *Tales*. They belonged to a sorry class of writings, licentious for mere indecency's sake, to which every age and country has more

<sup>5</sup> Leslie Stephen, *The Novels of Richardson*, in the *Works of S. Richardson*, ed. cit., vol. I.

or less contributed. The medieval grossness of the original of the *Bijoux*, an anonymous "merry tale," was but thinly veiled in the more polished style of the eighteenth-century writer. If we once more mention here this *péché de jeunesse*, it is because the influence of that kind of writing is perhaps not altogether absent from Diderot's next work in fiction.

This book, *La Religieuse*, was written in 1760 and left in an unfinished shape among the papers of Diderot. It was posthumously published by Naigeon in 1796. It is in the form of a long letter, or memoir, supposed to be founded on facts:<sup>6</sup> it is the story of an unfor-

\* For the foundation, or rather the pretext on which the story was built, see the *Préface-Annexe de La Religieuse* (V, 175, with the note by Naigeon). Yet we may wonder whether the whole memoir of the unhappy nun was indeed nothing but a contrivance imagined by Diderot and his friends to interest the absent M. de Croismare and drag him out of his country seat in Normandy back to the circle of Baron d'Holbach. It is not improbable that the first suggestion of the story came from what Diderot in 1760 knew of the life of Mlle de Lespinasse. The birth and the convent life of Sister Suzanne Simonin have much in common with those of Mlle de Lespinasse: see de Ségur, *Mlle de Lespinasse*. We know that Diderot, if he did not think of D'Alembert when he wrote *Le Fils Naturel*, at least thought of himself in composing *Le*

fortunate girl, of illegitimate birth, thrust by her mother and her legal father in a convent, against her will, to expiate her mother's sin. Her experience in the first two houses which she enters on trial, particularly in the second convent, under the authority of an abbess who is represented as a real saint and an excellent woman, convinces her that she is not fitted for the monastic life: not that she has any fondness for worldly life, or any kind of attachments in the outer world, but because her independent spirit loathes the life of a recluse. Yet, having taken the veil out of a feeling of duty to her mother and self-sacrifice to her family, the persecutions which she suffers under a narrow-minded and ferocious abbess who succeeds her saintly protectress induce her at length to ask for the rescinding of her vows. This step, which was no simple matter in pre-revolutionary France, brings about a recrudescence of cruel treatment against the poor wretch. Taken to another convent, under the rule of an abbess who suffers from a nervous disease, she is made as miserable

*Père de famille.* He had a great propensity, uncomfortable to those who were acquainted with him, of staging himself and everyone he knew: see the *Rêve de D'Alembert*, the play *Est-il bon? est-il méchant?* etc.



by this woman's affection as she had been by the other's cruelty. She escapes from this last establishment shortly after the mad woman's death, and her subsequent adventures, which lack a conclusion, are merely sketched in a few pages.

This book "was undoubtedly an expression of the strong feeling of the Encyclopaedic school about celibacy, renunciation of the world, and the burial of men and women alive in the cloister."<sup>7</sup> It was also a realistic, scientific study of the normal and abnormal psychology of human beings living in seclusion. Richardson had described the dangers and miseries that may assail innocent and virtuous girls in the world; Diderot showed what misfortunes may befall them outside of the family circle and society, in houses intended as refuges from the temptations and wickedness of the world.

Suzanne Simonin, the Nun, presents some features which remind the reader of Clarissa, Pamela, and sometimes perhaps of the unhappy Clementina. Like the first two of Richardson's

<sup>7</sup> J. Morley, *Diderot* . . . , vol. II, p. 32. On this subject, Diderot had expressed himself strongly in the articles "Célibat" and "Passager" of the *Encyclopédie*.

heroines, she is blessed with very many gifts of soul and body, of which she is not altogether unconscious. When, in a state of dazed despair, she first dons the monastic habit, she is still able to hear without displeasure the complimentary remarks of the other nuns on her outward appearance: "Just look, sister, how beautiful she is! how that black veil enhances the whiteness of her complexion! how well that band suits her! how it rounds off her face! how it expands her cheeks! how that habit fits her waist and her arms!' . . . I hardly listened to them; I was desolate; however, I must confess that, when I was alone in my cell, I recollected their flatteries; I could not help verifying them in my little looking-glass; and it seemed to me that they were not altogether undeserved."<sup>8</sup> Like Clarissa, she has been treated by her family with a harshness that her merits have not been able to disarm, but have rather increased. The initial motives of this exceptional treatment are in both cases financial considerations and a marriage transaction, to which is added,

<sup>8</sup> V, 15. Compare the innocent, naïve coquetry of Pamela, in *Works of S. Richardson*, ed. cit., vol. I, pp. 42, 53, etc.

for Diderot's heroine, the mystery of an irregular birth later unravelled by her.

"My father was a barrister. He had married my mother when he was somewhat advanced in years; by her he had three daughters. He had a greater fortune than was necessary to settle them comfortably; but in order to do that he should at least have divided his love equally between us, and I am far from being able to give his love this praise. I certainly excelled my sisters in wit and looks, in temper and talents; and it seemed as though my parents were grieved by this. As all the advantages which nature and application had given me over them became for me a source of sorrows, from my earliest years I wished to resemble them, in order always to be loved, petted, fondled, excused as they were. If someone happened to tell my mother that 'she had charming children,' that was never meant for me. I was sometimes well revenged for that injustice; but the praises which I had received cost me so dear as soon as we were alone, that I should have preferred indifference or even insults; the greater the preference which strangers had shown for me, the bitterer the ill-humor from which I suffered after they had gone. Oh! how often have I cried for not having been born ugly, silly, stupid, proud; in a word, with all the faults

which made them successful with my parents!"<sup>9</sup> (V, 11-12).

As the three girls grow up, marriage is thought of, and suitors appear. "My eldest sister was courted by a charming young man; I soon perceived that he was taking notice of me, and I guessed that presently my sister would be but a pretext for his attentions to me. I had a foreboding of the troubles that his preference might bring down upon me; and I told my mother about it"<sup>10</sup> (V, 12). Suzanne is rewarded for her disinterestedness by the announcement that she must immediately go into a convent, and steps are taken to this effect. The estate is divided between her two sisters, who are soon married. Her mother's fear that she might some day question the right of that partition and claim her legal share, thus associating a natural child with legitimate children, acts as a new and powerful incentive to get rid of her (V, 24, 27).

These are the few traits in the character and

<sup>9</sup> Compare *Clarissa Harlowe*, the motives of her family's enmity to her.

<sup>10</sup> Similarly *Clarissa* was preferred by Lovelace, who had come to woo her sister Arabella.

the adventures of the *Religieuse* which strike us as obviously reminiscent of the novels of Richardson. Presently Diderot frees himself from his model and starts to describe the ways of life in a convent, of which, as a Protestant, Richardson knew little.<sup>11</sup> Diderot's philosophic moralizings are of a nature very distinct from the Puritanic cant of the English author; his remarks on religious life in general, on some forms of exalted piety or mystical "enthusiasm" in particular, and on their effects on practical life and on minds lacking the monastic vocation, are as far as possible from Richardson's vein; as far indeed as the earnest feeling, for which the French philosopher finds an impartial expression, of the state of bliss and sanctity to which some souls manage to attain in conventual retreats. It should also be mentioned that, in spite of all the admiration which Diderot professed for Richardson's copiousness of details, there is little room for realistic trifles in *La Religieuse*: the work as a whole is short, the characters few in number, the narrative compact to a fault; little is allowed even for the description of gestures, that part of fiction

<sup>11</sup> See in *Grandison*, the story of Clementina.

which Diderot held to be often more eloquent than words. That very epistolary form which Rousseau was borrowing for his *Nouvelle Héloïse* in the same year, 1760, that useful fiction by which a variety of correspondents describe themselves and one another and slowly evolve the main action, as it were, by a process of gradual adumbration, is discarded by Diderot, who adopts the simpler and more direct form of the memoir, in the manner of Marivaux and Prévost.

One trait in *La Religieuse*, however, the most disagreeable perhaps to mention, may have been partly due to the influence of Richardson: we mean the thorough description of indecent or revolting scenes, the kind of stuff which Prévost had not thought fit to print in his translations of Richardson. It looks as if, in the earlier stages of the literature of "sentiment," mysterious connections were more openly and naïvely revealed between the traditional notions of sexual purity and certain forms of pruriency, between sentimental morality and an amazing fondness for improper descriptions which serve as texts to its preachings.<sup>12</sup> The

<sup>12</sup> This attitude of the "virtuous Richardson," without

preoccupation, nay, the obsession of the problems of sex was as characteristic of Richardson as of Diderot, and their notions concerning womanly honor, virtue, purity, were substantially the same. Little justification can be found in their moral intentions for their practice of describing in writing what is unmentionable in speech; because, if indeed their aim is ethical, and their novels are destined to "moralize" youthful readers, a good deal of expurgation is needed before their works are placed in the hands of "young persons of both sexes." When

which his novels would be meaningless, stands in curious contrast with the attitude of another great English novelist, a professed enemy of the sentimentalists, who has denounced "all these false sensations, peculiar to men, concerning the soiled purity of woman, the lost innocence, the brand of shame upon her, which are commonly the foul sentimentalism of such as can be too eager in the chase of corruption when occasion suits, and are another side of pruriency, not absolutely foreign from the best of us in our youth. . . ." "The young man who can look on them we call fallen women with a noble eye, is to my mind he that is most nobly begotten of the race, and likeliest to be the sire of a noble line" (George Meredith, *Ehoda Fleming*).

Why, in the judgment of many critics, Diderot seems to be credited with the pruriency and Richardson with the purity of a sentimental period, it is difficult to determine.

realistic pictures of certain aspects of life are given with a view to instilling the principles of virtue in the hearts of young persons, as Richardson would have said, the method employed is very likely to defeat the end; and the more power is applied to the descriptions in question, the more demoralizing the fiction may become. Should we accept the claim of all moral realists, that their intentions are irreproachable even when writing most repulsive, libidinous descriptions, their achievements in this line supply one more proof of the radical difference, often amounting to incompatibility, between a moral and an artistic purpose in a work of literature. Realism may have a great deal of scientific, social, artistic value; but it is a mistake to try and make realistic imitation instrumental for morality, for as the imitation becomes more perfect, as the reader comes nearer nature itself, he drifts farther and farther away from ethical concerns.

The trials of Pamela's and Clarissa's virtue, which by the way make the modern reader wonder how the poor creatures could still love their persecutors and entertain a wish to marry them, very probably had something to do with



the writing of those infamous scenes in which the *Religieuse* is the unconscious victim of *attentats à la pudeur*. One may of course object that Diderot had written more than one indecent page before, particularly in the *Bijoux Indiscrets*, which had nothing to do with Richardson's influence. But between that early work of Diderot and his *Religieuse*, there is all the difference which is found between a light and a serious work, between the inspiration of the *Parnasse Satyrique* and that of a master of realism, be he Richardson or Zola or Maupassant. In the same way, there is a strong analogy between the death of the insane abbess and the agony of the woman Sinclair in *Clarissa*. The portrait of each of those horrible creatures shows "a possibility of character of which the healthy, the pure, the unthinking have never dreamed. Such a portrait is not art, that is true; but it is science, and that delivers the critic from the necessity of searching his vocabulary for the cheap superlatives of moral censure."<sup>18</sup> Diderot is not free from a suspicion that he described the wicked and their courses with a little too much complacency; but Rich-

<sup>18</sup> J. Morley, *Diderot* . . . , vol. II, pp. 35-36.

ardson is exactly in the same plight. Like good realists, they both thought that everything in nature could be made the object of literary description, and were tempted to lay a little stress on the things that had not been very generally described before. Only, Diderot had too much sense to develop at great length the moral reflections suggested by his topic, and he knew how to avoid that painful insistency of the Puritan whose prolix commentary betrays an uncomfortable feeling that the purity of his intentions is more or less open to doubt.

Had Diderot looked abroad for examples of mere *gaillardise*, he would have found plenty to satisfy him in the healthier spirit of unsentimental novelists like Fielding and Smollett. But he never wrote anything in their vein, probably because he knew it well enough, and it would have led him straight back to *Gil Blas*. There was more novelty in the manner of Sterne, which invested improper jests, derived from a long and almost venerable literary tradition, with an original style and a transparent veil of proper intentions and childish innocence.

We have seen<sup>14</sup> how *Tristram Shandy* was all the rage in Paris when Sterne went there in 1763. Just as Pantagruelism, "which you know is a certain jollity of mind, pickled in the scorn of fortune,"<sup>15</sup> had been the fashion two centuries or so before, when it was preached by the Curé of Meudon, so Shandyism now gained the hearts of French readers to "Yorick," the parson of Sutton and Stillington. What was Shandyism?—Shandyism was *la sensibilité*, or sentiment, with everything that the word carried with Richardson, that is, pity, goodness, benevolence, beneficence, a disposition to love all mankind and to fall in love with this or that individual when chance served, a blend of philanthropy and amorousness, the whole "pickled" in that peculiar English form of "jollity of mind" which is called humor. The Shandean was full of sentiment and laughed at himself for it; he dared make fun of the feeling which everyone had been taking seriously, but his saving grace in the eyes of his contemporaries was that he himself was a man of feeling;

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter II, *Diderot's English friends*.

<sup>15</sup> Rabelais, "The Author's Prologue" to the *Fourth Book*, Motteux transl.

like Gargantua on a memorable occasion, he wept with one eye and laughed with the other. The humor of Shandyism, besides, was not the fierce humor of a Swift,<sup>16</sup> or a Smollett, which until that day most Frenchmen had taken to be typical of that British variety of mirth, but an indirect, urbane, innocent-looking, "parsonical" kind of wit, which constantly hinted enormous improprieties and at once reproved the reader for imagining wicked things.

Walpole sneered at the infatuation of French readers for *Tristram Shandy*, while his *Castle of Otranto*, although translated into French, failed to become popular. If Richardson was aware of his own success in France, one might almost imagine that, when he died in 1761, it was from a broken heart, because he had found a rival there in a writer whom he despised, Laurence Sterne. Sterne's popularity in France, which increased greatly after the publication of

<sup>16</sup> Voltaire in his *Lettres philosophiques* had given as a specimen of "humour" Swift's *Modest Proposal for preventing the children of poor people in Ireland from being a burden to their parents or country, and for making them beneficial to the public*. Diderot in the *Encyclopédie*, article "Humour," uses the same illustration.

the *Sentimental Journey*, was to last long after the close of the eighteenth century, as long as "sensibility," romantic egotism, and the fondness for eccentricity.<sup>17</sup> The *Sentimental Journey* was translated first, in 1769, by Frenais; the more wearisome task of putting *Tristram Shandy* into French, begun by the same translator (2 vols, 1776), was completed in 1785 in two separate translations, one by La Baume, the other by the Marquis de Bonnay. But the more cultured part of Parisian society had not waited for these translations to become acquainted with Sterne's works. Mlle de Lespinasse, the Count de Bissy, Diderot were devoted Shandean from the very first. Diderot in 1773, on his return from Russia, completed a curious book, entitled *Jacques le Fataliste*, which was published only in 1796; as this work is generally described as being in the manner of Sterne, let us now consider what it owed to the English humorist.

"Mr F. B. Barton, in the preface of his interesting *Etude sur l'influence de Laurence Sterne en France au dix-huitième siècle* (Doctorat d'université, Paris, 1911), counts seventy French editions of the *Sentimental Journey*, about twenty-five of *Tristram*, five or six of Sterne's complete works, and twenty of his miscellaneous works.

There is, to our knowledge, no instance in comparative literature of an apparently more obvious "influence" than this, of *Tristram Shandy* on *Jacques le Fataliste*. It does not consist in general literary tendencies, or the application of common doctrines on art, or in reminiscences, as was the case for *La Religieuse*: Diderot himself calls it "plagiarism," to anticipate the very worst that malevolent critics would not fail, and have not failed, triumphantly to proclaim. The whole of the preamble of *Jacques* is borrowed from *Tristram*; <sup>18</sup> the method of narration is exceedingly discursive, full of interruptions and digressions; and, towards the end, Diderot in these words returns to the episode in *Tristram* from which he had started:

"Here is the second paragraph, copied from the life of *Tristram Shandy*, unless the conversation between Jacques the Fatalist and his master be anterior to that work, and the Reverend Sterne be the plagiarist, which I do not believe, but it is out of a very particular regard for Mr Sterne, whom I except from most writers of his nation, among whom it is a rather

<sup>18</sup> *Tristram Shandy*, Book VIII, Chapt. 19-23 (Saintsbury edition, London, 1900, vol. III, pp. 142-151).

frequent custom to rob and then to abuse us" (VI, 284).

Diderot proceeds to recount as a conclusion how his Jacques, just like Corporal Trim, fell in love while his wound was being massaged. But it is curious to note that Sterne's gross intention, which was the key to the whole tale, and the double meaning involved in his reflection that Trim's amour with the Béguine "contained in it the essence of all the love romances which ever have been wrote since the beginning of the world," were entirely missed by Diderot. Yet this is not surprising, for the roundabout style and the peculiar form of wit of Sterne (to say nothing of the material difficulty which Diderot had in understanding colloquial English) were far from akin to Diderot's very plain speech.

What then attracted or interested Diderot in *Tristram*? And why did he choose to begin and conclude his *Jacques* with passages quoted from that book? The most natural assumption, which has been repeatedly made since the publication of *Jacques le Fataliste*,<sup>19</sup> is, that he

<sup>19</sup> Assézat quotes (VI, 5) the earliest criticism of *Jacques le Fataliste*, from the *Décade philosophique*,

meant to imitate the style and the humor of Sterne. It has also been suggested by Assézat (VI, 7) that Diderot intended to show how easy that manner of trifling was, and how the most intricate piece of fiction, in spite of Sterne's example, could after many wanderings be brought to some sort of conclusion. Again, that in Sterne's mode of composition, or rather in his lack of construction, he found a suitable framework to support a variety of short stories which he had among his *petits papiers*, narrative sketches written for his own and his friends' entertainment.

Each of these conjectures seems plausible enough to the critical reader of *Jacques le Fataliste*. It has been pointed out that Diderot's imitation is not limited to the beginning and the end of his book, where it is more apparent, but runs more or less through the whole. He not only follows Sterne's whimsical method of story-telling, and tries "most of his narrative where it is declared to be "a very feeble imitation of *Tristram*." F. B. Barton, *Influence de Sterne*, 1911, takes substantially the same position. We refer the reader to this last work (Chap. IV, p. 98) for a parallel between the original and the borrowed passages, which it would be too lengthy to make here anew.



gymnastics,"<sup>20</sup> but he is rather haunted by reminiscences from *Tristram*. The amours of Jacques, and to a lesser degree those of his master, are the supposed thread of Ariadne in this labyrinth of narration, just as the amours of Uncle Toby, and incidentally those of Trim, were something like the main action in *Tristram Shandy*. Both Trim and Jacques have been soldiers, and therefore believe in fatalism,—"Military men are apt to be superstitious," Diderot remarks; both have been wounded in the knee, and this wound is the occasion for each of them to tell his master how he fell in love. The masters listen to their valets with benevolent kindness. Trim and Jacques both have a brother in Lisbon; Trim's brother is supposed to be groaning in the cells of the Inquisition, Jacques's brother meets his fate in the Lisbon earthquake. Masters and valets alike have habitual gestures or *tics* which are supposed to be characteristic.<sup>21</sup> As a whole,

<sup>20</sup> C. S. Baldwin, "The Literary Influence of Sterne in France," in *Modern Language Assoc. Public.*, vol. XVII (New Series, X), Number 2, p. 227.

<sup>21</sup> Other reminiscences of analogies, some of which are rather doubtful, are: the comparison of the soul with the grub becoming a butterfly (VI, 195); social char-

however, the Sternian elements in *Jacques* remain artificial. The two main characters do not live by any life of their own; like most of Diderot's other creations, they serve as mouth-pieces for their author. The general plan of the book, as far as there is one, is much better connected, the contents are more serious and philosophic, though less picturesque and humorous, than in Sterne's flighty masterpiece. Diderot's trifling is less amusing and his thought more substantial. To sum up, as a modern critic has excellently put it, Diderot's imitation is not "of the tone, but of the method and

acters likened to worn coins; the "bed of justice" (p. 26); the sentimental effusions of the Master about his horse, and of the Hostess about her dog; Jacques's tearful disposition. Lastly, Diderot's mysterious riders, at least in the opening pages of the book, remind one of the puzzling rider with the long nose, out of Slawkenbergius, in *Tristram Shandy*.—As for those "narrative gymnastics" which consist in interruptions, alleged gaps in the manuscript, apostrophes to the reader, they were common in the less proper kinds of literature before the age of Sterne, when it was no longer possible to write coarse things plainly. See *Bijoux Indiscrets*, pp. 176, 299, 336, etc., and in the *Essay on Claudius and Nero* (III, 74), apostrophes to "Monsieur l'abbé," as Yorick apostrophized "Madam" or his friend "Eugenius."

manner; only there is somewhat more method and much less manner."<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, *Jacques le Fataliste* certainly contains satirical intentions directed against novels of adventure, possibly also against that nondescript of literature, *Tristram Shandy*, which so oddly jumbles together the elements of the obscene novel, the novel of adventure, the novel of character and manners, the essay, the sermon, and what not other ingredients. Just after setting out, Diderot remarks: "You see, reader, that I am in a fair way, and that it would only depend on me to keep you waiting one, two, three years for the story of the amours of Jacques. . . . What would prevent me from making his master get married? from shipping Jacques off to the West Indies? taking his master over there? bringing them both back to France on the same vessel? How easy it is to write tales!" (VI, 11). All the possibilities, all the complications which a given situation might bring about are thus reviewed by Diderot, time and time again, as his story proceeds, to show how cheap he holds them:<sup>23</sup> it would have

<sup>22</sup> C. S. Baldwin, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

<sup>23</sup> See VI, pp. 13, 21, 23, 43, etc.

had "an infectious smell" of Prévost's *Cléland*; it would have been as artificial and easy-flowing a narrative as all the *romans à tiroirs*, *Gil Blas*, *Tom Jones*, *Roderick Random*, *Candide*, and a thousand more, in which incident follows on incident, apparently without end, until it pleases the author to stop. Diderot prefers a series of "true stories," anecdotes from life, such as those about Messrs Le Peltier and Aubertot (p. 60), about Jacques's captain and his friend (p. 68), about Gousse and Prémontval (p. 70), about Suzon and the priest (p. 121), etc., the authenticity of which he vouches for and seems to consider as a great recommendation. Here, as in his plays, Diderot takes a pride in being a realist; he scorns the mere imaginative tale, he keeps repeating "Ceci n'est pas un conte,"<sup>24</sup> he weaves real adventures, "histories," in the loose fabric of his *Jacques le Fataliste*. In his eyes truth is much more valuable than fiction. "I do not care for novels, except for those of Richardson. I make a history; this history will please or will not please, that is the least of my concerns. My

<sup>24</sup> This is the title of his touching story of the unfortunate Mlle de la Chaux.

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aim is to be true, I have attained it. . . . I see that, with a little imagination and style, nothing is easier than to spin a novel" (VI, 239).

Therefore it seems likely that, although the setting of *Jacques* is borrowed from Sterne, Diderot never intended to rival him, or to rank among novelists of any description whatsoever. He threw into a handy mould a farrago of anecdotes, which are perfect in their way, each of them complete, and not at all so disconnected as the reader might have expected from an imitator of Sterne. His imitation of Sterne does not go deep; it is a mere screen, a pretext, for the introduction of a large number of original developments. And this original part, which is the most important in the book, owes nothing whatever to Sterne's plots, characters, humor, or fanciful tricks of writing; it is Diderot pure and simple.

There is besides a philosophic part in the work, a discussion of Fatalism, which gives rise to all the reflections, paradoxes, syllogisms and logical absurdities which may result from a critical consideration of the Mohammedan *Mek-toub*, "It was written." Supposing a man—Jacques—who firmly believes, after Zeno, Mo-

gether careless of saving proprieties by the use of innuendoes. In a sort of frame plastered up at both ends with two fragments from Sterne, he threw in confusedly, helter skelter, not only the arguments of fatalism, but also a collection of true anecdotes and short stories which owed nothing whatever to the English humorist, either in matter or in tone. The result is *Jacques le Fataliste* as we know it: a work of mosaic, a very composite novel, written in a free, conversational style, very different from Sterne's artistic style, a dialogue enlivened every now and then by elaborate philosophical, critical, and narrative passages. It is in some respects fortunate that *Jacques le Fataliste* should not always recall Sterne and Rabelais to the mind; for all comparisons between those of Humor and a philosopher who are bound to bring scorn are considered as an essential part of it is even in that described to and de after ally and exqu



a man's life, with a pessimistic instead of an optimistic clause subjoined to it, assumed in *Tristram Shandy* the aspect of a hopeless and unavoidable confusion; it only came in to show how distressing such a notion makes the task of a story-teller who is anxious properly to refer each effect to its cause, and each fact in the present to its antecedent in the past. A much more consistent effort was made by Diderot to analyze the fatalistic belief, not in the light of optimism, or pessimism, but simply to show how what men call chance works in everyday life, how artificial is the representation of reality as imaginative novelists are wont to give it, and how true stories are not so apt as fictions to turn out exactly as we expected that they would. Diderot probably thought of Voltaire's *Candide* when he pointed out how easily he could at every step make his tale branch out in various directions, how he might, if he wished, carry his characters into the remotest parts of the globe at a moment's notice. What becomes for instance of Frère Jean, the brother of Jacques, after he has escaped with Frère Ange from the persecution of wicked monks? Like *Candide*, with Doctor Pangloss and that good Dutch Ana-

baptist who was also called Jacques, the two monks went to Lisbon, "there to find an earthquake, which could not take place without them."<sup>28</sup> There they also met their doom, "as it was written above," whereas Candide and Pangloss, as is well known, only escaped the earthquake to fall into the hands of the Inquisition. Now, Trim's worthy brother, having married a Jew's widow who sold sausages in Lisbon, was also a victim of the Inquisitors. Thus, of the two dreaded calamities which had overtaken Voltaire's pair of philosophic optimists in the capital of Portugal, Sterne naturally enough remembered the catastrophe which vividly illustrated the intolerant and persecuting spirit of "Popery," a subject on which he could outdo Voltaire in warmth of denunciation; while Diderot chose the earthquake incident as being more to his purpose. Lastly, it may be noted that there is some analogy between Diderot's "true story" of the indigent poet whom he sent to Pondicherry so that he might

<sup>28</sup> The Lisbon earthquake happened in 1756. Voltaire's *Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne* (1758) discussed the notion of Providence and the tenets of Optimism supported by Shaftesbury, Leibnitz, and Pope.

get rich quickly and afford to write bad poetry afterwards, and Voltaire's satire entitled *Le Pauvre Diable*, which was published in 1758.

To conclude, it seems very possible that the first outline of *Jacques le Fataliste* may have been written as early as 1760; it was then intended as a philosophic story after Voltaire's model, on the subject of determinism or fatalism. Diderot's contributions to the *Encyclopédie* on Zeno and the Stoics, Spinoza, Leibnitz, and other determinists, which he had completed before this time, supplied the philosophic material in abundance. Happening then to read *Tristram Shandy*, he paid much more attention to the manner in which it illustrated the vagaries of chance than to its style and humor, the originality of which he could not very well perceive. The episode of Trim's wound and his love, and the fatalistic saying of Trim's captain, that "each bullet has its billet," served as centers around which all the rest crystallized. Diderot discarded Sterne's typographical oddities; he made a weak attempt to characterize his heroes by habitual gestures; he proved more methodical in the management of his narrative eccentricities, less discursive and digressive, and alto-

hammed, or Spinoza, that a strict necessity rules the world, that he cannot help his destiny, that all he thinks, does, and suffers was written down from eternity "in the big book above," no line of which can ever be changed; would not the adventures of such a man make an entertaining *conte philosophique*?

Now, the great creator of the philosophic tale, Voltaire, had just published his *Candide ou l'Optimisme* (1759) when Sterne began to write the first instalments of *Tristram Shandy*. Faint gleams of a philosophic purpose may be discerned in the opening chapters of *Tristram*, which its author placed under the patronage of the Moon, the "Bright Goddess" who had made the world go mad after Cunegund and Candid.<sup>25</sup> What is Sterne's pale hero but a victim of circumstance, a wretch predestined from his earliest beginning, before even he was born, to odd misfortunes, and forever incapable of thinking or writing anything in an orderly, logical manner? The initial data of his psychological make-up, as they are found in the first chapters

<sup>25</sup> *Tristram Shandy*, Book I, Chap. 9 (Saintsbury edition, p. 19).—On *Candide*, see M. André Morize's article in *Revue du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Jan.—March, 1913); also his critical edition of that work, Paris, 1913.

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pared and dished up with great skill."<sup>29</sup> Goethe says that he enjoyed the whole meal; but other critics may pass some of the courses.

It has been asserted that Sterne's influence made Diderot conscious of the resources which he could find in the description of gestures to make his stories more real and give a more concrete vision of his characters.<sup>30</sup> Sterne, according to this theory, taught Diderot the value of this important part of the narrative art, and is to some extent responsible for the progress made by Diderot between *La Religieuse*, in 1760, and such tales as the *Neveu de Rameau*, the *Conversation d'un père avec ses enfants*, and *Ceci n'est pas un conte*, all written after 1770. This seems a little difficult to admit. Sterne had touched Diderot too lightly to affect his style in any lasting manner. No glowing eulogy of Sterne is to be found anywhere in the works of Diderot; he does not even quote him once as a master of that great art of *pantomime* on which so much stress had been laid, not only in the dissertations on the *Fils Naturel* and the *Père de*

<sup>29</sup> Quoted by J. Morley, *Diderot . . .*, vol. II, p. 38.

<sup>30</sup> F. B. Barton, *L'Influence de Sterne*, Chapitre IV, end.

*famille*, which had appeared before Sterne became famous, but in the *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, of 1773. Diderot would surely have acknowledged in 1773 what he owed to Sterne, if he had learnt from him the secrets of such a valuable art as that of descriptive pantomime. For this he admires no other master beside Richardson.

Neither Richardson nor Sterne, however, appear to have left any trace in Diderot's other works of fiction, or rather narration, since he prided himself on always writing from facts. A philosophical conception generally dominates these pieces: a criticism of common morality in *Rameau's Nephew*, that wonderful picture of a Bohemian who is a great musician, a parasite, a buffoon, and a kind of Zarathoustra all in one;—some interesting cases of moral casuistry, expounded by Diderot's worthy father talking with his children around the fire in their home at Langres;<sup>31</sup>—the cruelty of people who love no more and are still loved, in the lamentable true story of Mlle de la Chaux;—a return to the criticism of common morality, but this time

<sup>31</sup> *Entretien d'un père avec ses enfants.*

limited to the question of sex only, in the *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*.

Bougainville in 1771 had related the voyage of circumnavigation which he had accomplished, by the King's order, between 1766 and 1769, on the frigate *La Boudeuse* escorted by the transport *L'Etoile*.<sup>32</sup> In his preface, Bougainville

<sup>32</sup> Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, *Voyage autour du monde, par la frégate du roi La Boudeuse et la flûte L'Etoile, en 1766, 1767, 1768, et 1769*, Paris, 1771, 1 vol. 4to.—This was translated into English by John Reinhold Forster, Dublin, 1772, 8vo.

In 1771 John Hawkesworth, thanks to his friend Garrick, was appointed by Lord Sandwich, First Lord of the Admiralty, to publish an account of the English explorations in the South Seas: this appeared in 1773, in 3 vols 4to, as *An Account of the Voyages undertaken by the order of His present Majesty for making discoveries in the Southern Hemisphere, and successfully performed by Commodore Byron, Captain Wallis, Captain Carteret, and Captain Cook, in the Dolphin, the Swallow, and the Endeavour*. As a consequence of this editorial work Hawkesworth was so harassed by critics that he died in the same year.

Bougainville's *Account* deals with the moral notions of the Tahitians on p. 197; he also spoke of the white woman disguised, named Baré, p. 254, and of a noble old Tahitian who seemed to foretell dire catastrophes to his countrymen from the coming of white men, p. 192. Diderot adds much to these few data, partly, as it seems,

reviewed the thirteen voyages around the world which had preceded his own, from Magellan's in 1519 down to the more recent English expeditions by Anson (1740-1744), Byron (1764), Wallis and Carteret (1766-1769). Wallis had preceded him in Tahiti by a very short time, and Cook was on his way there (1768-1771) before the French navigator had returned home. Diderot was greatly interested in Bougainville's relation of his voyage, and he possibly read also the collection of *Voyages* which John Hawkesworth published in 1773, for the English government, from the accounts of the English explorers. But it was not as a geographer, nor as a political economist considering the possibilities of future economic expansion for his country, that Diderot read and admired these wonderful stories of traffics and discoveries: the philosopher found an occasion to moralize in the from Hawkesworth and the discussions in the *Annual Register* and the *Gentleman's Magazine* concerning the immorality of the Tahitians. Bougainville charges Wallis's companions with having brought a contagious disease into the islands; Cook (in Hawkesworth, vol. III, p. 82) returns the charge against Bougainville; but Wallis's attempt to vindicate himself (Hawkesworth, vol. I, p. 324) had conclusively proved the case against his own expedition.

consequences of the arrival of white men among happy savages, and, in the consideration of the religious and moral ideas of those islanders, an excellent starting-point to study critically, as Montaigne had done in his chapter *On Cannibals*, the foundations of natural religion and natural ethics.

As usual, this sort of *conte philosophique* runs at once into the form of a dialogue; this introduces the fictitious *Supplément* to Bougainville's book, an ingenious fabrication in the manner of Saunderson's dying speech; and the *Supplément* in its turn is a dialogue, between a good Tahitian and the Catholic priest who ministered to the spiritual needs of the two French ships,—Bougainville tells us that his name was La Vèze. The total absence of modesty by which Wallis, Bougainville, and Cook had been struck on arriving in Tahiti, the shameless and apparently naïve libidinous habits of the natives which greatly excited the interest of the contemporary reviewers and readers, became with Diderot a theme for prolonged discussions between the Abbé and Orou concerning morality, propriety, marriage, religious institu-

tions, and the celibacy of priests. There is no need to enter with them into the discussion of the old sceptical theme concerning the relativity of human ideas, nor of the belief cherished by Diderot and the school of Shaftesbury, and seemingly confirmed by the kindly disposition of the Tahitians, that human nature was good.

It suffices that the *Supplément*, as well as Diderot's previous attempts at novel-writing, points to the conclusion that the good philosopher was not any more gifted for the novel than for the drama, because his personality insisted on obtruding itself in everything he wrote. In spite of his wish to be objective and to follow reality faithfully, he appeared in his own person everywhere, as a dogmatic or a critical moralist. He started indeed from some ground of reality, generally borrowed from his experience or his reading; but he at once rose to philosophic generalization, and then his rationalistic ego prevailed, together with his unconquerable fondness for intellectual analysis, in the light of which the most respected systems were speedily undermined. The philosophic tale, an eminently French genre, in which Renan was to

excel after Voltaire, was, much more truly than either Richardson's or Sterne's novels, the kind of fiction for which Diderot was best fitted, and in which "it was written" that he should leave his mark.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE CRITIC

*"Sunt qui cogitationum vertigine delectantur, ac pro servitute habent fide fixâ aut axiomatis constantibus constringi."* With these words, from Bacon, a great French critic once characterized Diderot.<sup>1</sup> Although this sentence is meant, both by its author and the writer who quoted him, to convey a good deal of blame, it may well be asked whether it does not sound a little like praise when applied to a philosopher. Diderot certainly would have felt rather flattered than grieved by a description of him which placed him in the same class with his masters Montaigne and Bayle. "As for me," he frankly wrote one day, "I concern myself more with forming than with dissipating clouds, with suspending judgments than with judging" (I, 369); and, in his *Refutation of Helvétius*: "I do not decide, I ask questions" (II, 388). This independence from preconceived principles, this

<sup>1</sup> F. Brunetière, *Manuel de l'hist. de la litt. franç.*, 1st edition, 1898, p. 314.



scepticism which delights in the free examination of ideas and in the exercise of thought for its own sake, is to be borne in mind when attempting to define Diderot's position in criticism. "I do not like Diderot very much," said Brunetière, "and one of the reasons I have for not liking him is, that after reading his works over more than once I am still and always in doubt as to what he was."<sup>2</sup> It is probable that the more dogmatic intellect of the evolutionistic critic failed to understand Diderot sympathetically for the very reason that Diderot had above all avoided being bound "by a fixed faith and constant axioms." It is both easier and safer to trace the history—or, to use the modern term, the evolution—of Diderot's critical ideas, as one should do for all his ideas, than to try and state them in some complete and systematic whole.

Several times indeed, and in several fields of inquiry, he had attempted to fix his thought in its essential forms, to reach some solid foundations for his beliefs. In ethics, he had followed Shaftesbury, only to find in the end that he could not possibly prove his inmost persuasion,

<sup>2</sup> F. Brunetière, *L'évolution des genres*, 2d edition, 1892, p. 153.

that a good, virtuous life was the best. He had sincerely believed, with Richardson, in sexual morality, and yet had found, in the peculiar notions entertained on this subject in Tahiti, a proof of "the inconvenience there is in attaching moral ideas to certain physical actions which do not admit of any." He had not only preached, but lived up to, a gospel of benevolence and philanthropy, and, on the other hand, denied all merit, virtue and moral responsibility with Jacques the Fatalist, and depicted in Rameau's nephew a sort of Nietzschean *avant la lettre*, who deliberately lived "beyond good and evil" and professed a distressingly plausible creed of selfishness and immorality. In science, he had shown a truly Baconian contempt for builders of systems, he had commended facts and experiments above everything else, and then left his record in the history of scientific thought mainly as a forerunner of Evolutionism, the most far-reaching system of modern times. In dramatic literature, he had elaborately laid down a new body of rules, concluding however with these words: "Remember that there is not one of these rules which genius cannot successfully infringe."—Who could expect such a

thinker to adhere throughout his life to a creed in criticism, especially at a time when old tenets were being revised or overthrown, when Classicism was on the wane and Romanticism was dawning?

Diderot's critical ideas concerning dramatic literature have already been considered. Although they constitute the most elaborate and coherent part of his work as a critic, that also by which he was best known in his lifetime and through which perhaps he exerted the widest influence, yet they are dependent on a higher, more general system of criticism, which he never was able to grasp fully and expound as a whole. This system may be deduced from his theoretical discussion on "the Beautiful" in the *Encyclopédie*, from passages in the *Letter on the Deaf and Dumb* and the *Literary Miscellanies*, and from the reports, entitled *Salons*, which he wrote for Grimm's *Correspondance littéraire* on the art exhibitions held in Paris every other year after 1751.

As for the particular question of the English influence on Diderot in general criticism, in art criticism, and in the criticism of poetry, it is much less simple than the questions studied in

the preceding chapters, concerning his indebtedness to English philosophy and science, or to the dramatists and novelists of England. In matters of poetics and esthetics, France had for about a century laid down the classical canons which English writers and critics had more or less reluctantly followed. The "noble freedom" of the English, when displayed in literature, met with much less appreciation among the French than when it exerted itself in politics, in science, in philosophy and in divinity. And on the other hand it looked as if the more polite English writers, ever since 1660, had been ashamed of their national literary tradition, and more eager than even the French to place themselves under the authority of Boileau, Bouhours, Rapin, Le Bossu, or Du Bos. Diderot therefore, while he felt greatly interested by the independent spirit which began to reassert itself in English poetry towards the middle of the eighteenth century, might very well believe that in a general way the truth in esthetics was still on the side of the French neo-classical tradition.

Besides, esthetic problems were no longer so simple as they had been in the preceding century. From the domain of literature they had

been extended to all the other arts. The question no longer was, for instance, as in the early seventeenth century, which should prevail, popular and romantic forms or the learned and classical models; nor was it, as in the latter part of the reign of Louis XIV, whether the Ancients or the Moderns had reached the highest point of literary perfection in all kinds. But critics, following up a traditional misconception of a misquoted passage of Horace, *Ut pictura poesis*,<sup>3</sup> had sought to define those philosophic concepts which underlie all artistic activity,—Art, the Beautiful, and Nature. From the moment when criticism had ceased to be merely literary and had carried its inquiries into all the fields of art, general esthetic criticism had appeared, the philosophy of the Beautiful had been born.

It is not possible to assign a precise date to this important fact of the generalization of criticism, which gave rise to esthetics. In France, the granting of royal patronage to the fine arts under the reign of Louis XIV had in a manner interested the learned in the essence and

<sup>3</sup> See an interesting paper on this subject, by Mr W. G. Howard, in *Modern Lang. Assoc. Publications*, 1909, vol. XXIV (New Series, vol. XVII), pp. 40-124.

principles of other arts besides literature; later on, the wider popularity which painting, sculpture, architecture and all the liberal arts had gained during the regency and the reign of Louis XV, when their patrons were found in greater numbers in town than at court, made their concerns a common topic for all polite conversations. In England, meanwhile, artistic preoccupations had begun to be considered an essential part of a gentlemanly education, and amateurs, connoisseurs or "virtuosi" had become legion. Thus it is that, long before Diderot, both in England and France, a close alliance had been established between literary criticism and art criticism; and, in attempts to outline a philosophy of the Beautiful, the ideals of arts which differed in purpose and means of expression had been more and more combined, amalgamated, and often hopelessly confused.<sup>4</sup>

Among the most celebrated virtuosi in the reign of Queen Anne was Shaftesbury, the philosopher whose system of ethics had fired Di-

<sup>4</sup> On the origin and development of this confusion between artistic ideals, see the preface of Lessing's *Laocoon*, and for a fuller and more critical account Prof. Irving Babbitt's *New Laocoon*, Chap. I.

derot with enthusiasm. His principles of esthetics were intimately connected with his ethical theories. For him there was more than an analogy, there was almost an identity between morality and art. Both were conceived by him as originating in a kind of natural taste, an innate faculty of discerning between good and evil, beauty and ugliness. The Beautiful and the Good, according to him, were intuitively felt, immediately recognized, by a kind of instinct proper to all generous, unsophisticated souls. Beauty referred to things; morality to actions and characters. Shaftesbury did not go further, he refused to analyze those innate notions of the Good and the Beautiful. For him, they shone by their own splendor, they were as clear and distinct as any "first principles" in Descartes; for a criterion, which might have afforded the basis for a more satisfactory definition, the author of the *Characteristics* gave nothing but a rather vague "harmony."<sup>5</sup>

This uncritical attitude was maintained and in a way exaggerated by Shaftesbury's disciple,

<sup>5</sup> Leslie Stephen, *English Thought in the eighteenth century*, vol. II, pp. 26, 31-32. Also Thomas Fowler, *Shaftesbury and Hutcheson*, pp. 67-70, and 126 ff.

Hutcheson, in his *Inquiry concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, and Design* (1725).<sup>6</sup> With Hutcheson, the metaphors of Shaftesbury became philosophic entities: the "moral sense" and the "esthetic sense" were spoken of as though they had been as real as the sense of sight or the sense of hearing.—Crousaz, in his *Traité du Beau* (1715) had enumerated the kinds of the Beautiful rather than defined its nature.—The Jesuit Father André, whose *Essai sur le Beau* (1741) also gave a full description of the concrete forms of the Beautiful, followed Shaftesbury and Hutcheson in assigning a character of Cartesian evidence to the perception of beauty.

On the more particular subject of the relations between the different arts, the Abbé Du

<sup>6</sup> This was one of two treatises by Hutcheson which appeared in 1725. They were translated into French by Eidous, one of Diderot's assistants in the translation of *James's Dictionary*, under this title: *Recherches sur l'origine des idées que nous avons de la Beauté et de la Vertu, en deux traités: le Premier, sur la Beauté, l'Ordre, l'Harmonie et le Dessin; le Second, sur le Bien et le Mal Physique et Moral*; from the 4th English edition; 2 vols, Amsterdam, 1749. Diderot, while disagreeing with Hutcheson, strongly recommends the perusal of his work, "especially in the original" (X, 17).



Bos had written some *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et la peinture* which were widely read and ran through six editions between 1719 and 1765; and the Abbé Batteux, in 1746, had concluded an era of long and unfruitful discussions concerning the principles of esthetics, with his *Beaux-Arts réduits à un même principe*,—a title which is descriptive of the aim pursued by all esthetic critics up to 1750. The common principle to which all arts were reduced was “the imitation of beautiful nature,”—a baffling definition, as Diderot justly remarked, when the question was to define *la belle nature* itself.

We need not enter into Diderot’s discussion, in his article “Beau,”<sup>7</sup> of the results attained by his predecessors. His account of Plato’s and Augustine’s theories of the Beautiful, which he copied from Father André, was followed by a critical examination of the systems of Wolf, Crousaz, Hutcheson, Shaftesbury, Batteux, and André. To this last he gave the preference. But he brought his efforts more or less success-

<sup>7</sup>Printed separately as *Recherches philosophiques sur l’origine et la nature du Beau* (1751), as a specimen of the *Encyclopédie*; and thus reprinted in the Amsterdam edition (1773), also by Naigeon, and by Assézat (vol. X).

fully to bear upon the question of the origin, the formation of the concept of Beauty. He would not see in it an innate idea, reflecting some transcendent essence supposed to exist objectively in the Platonic world of ideas. Truer to the principles of Locke than Locke's own disciple, Shaftesbury, he reduced the notion of the Beautiful to sensations accumulated and generalized; he defined the esthetic feeling by the perception of *relations*, and then attempted to confirm and to complete his definition by bringing all the various kinds of beauty within the scope of his rather abstract formula.

This abstract character prevented his theory from becoming widely accepted. To most critics it has seemed that his earnest effort to determine the nature of the Beautiful philosophically had resulted in a vague, narrowly intellectual, and altogether unsatisfactory definition. This may not appear quite fair, if one will but follow Diderot's explanation and see whether his meaning is not clearer and deeper than one is inclined to think at first sight:

“When I say, *whatever calls up in our minds the idea of relations*, I do not mean that we must, in order to call a thing *beautiful*, appre-

ciate what kind of relations reign in it; I do not require that the man who sees a piece of architecture should be able to state, what even the architect may not know, that this part is to that other part as such a number is to such another number; I do not require that the man who hears a concert should know, when sometimes the musician is ignorant of it, that this sound stands to this other sound in the relation of two to four, or four to five. It suffices that he should perceive and feel that the parts of that architecture, the sounds of that musical piece, have some relations either between themselves or with other objects. It is the indetermination of these relations, the ease with which they are perceived, and the pleasure which attends their perception, that have caused men to imagine that the beautiful was a matter of feeling rather than of reason."

Diderot here appears in his usual rôle of destroyer of artificial distinctions: the "faculties" of the soul, just as the "kingdoms" of nature, and the "genres" of literature, are convenient categories, but should not be mistaken for realities existing independently and separated from one another by hard and fast partitions. Having thus shown that there is a large intellectual element in the feelings of esthetic pleasure, especially in those of a higher grade, he goes on to

apply his theory to all the so-called "innate" ideas or principles, reducing them likewise to an empiric source:

"I dare assert that, whenever a principle has been familiar to us from early childhood, and whenever through habit we apply it easily and immediately to external objects, we believe that we judge concerning such objects through sentiment; but we are compelled to confess our error in all the cases where the complication of the relations and the novelty of the object suspend the application of the principle: then the pleasure must wait, before it is felt, until the understanding has decided that the object is beautiful" (X, 29).

In other words, the esthetic feeling, according to Diderot, resolves itself into two classes of elements: first, the unconscious or subconscious perception of some mathematical relations existing between certain lines, or colors, or sounds; secondly, the associations which in our minds are connected with those harmonies of lines, colors, or sounds. His theory, though perhaps it affected a little too much empiricism, was remarkable in that it sought a subjective instead of an objective explanation of the esthetic judgment. His early work in acoustics,

and his later *Eléments d'harmonie*, published under the name of the musician Bemetzrieder, sufficiently prove that he knew a great deal about the physical causes of musical pleasure, while his *Essai sur la peinture* shows a great degree of familiarity with the technique of color and design. As for the associations which so largely contribute to the true appreciation of artistic works of every kind, the suggestiveness which enhances the pleasure of harmonies perceived by the organs of sense, the whole body of Diderot's art criticism witnesses that he never lost sight of it.

Unfortunately, after outlining this fundamentally sound theory of the esthetic emotions, in reaction against his English and French predecessors, he allowed some other notions to interfere with it which were irrelevant and hardly reconcilable with empiricism. Foremost among these stands the ethical idea.

Under Shaftesbury's influence, later strengthened by the precepts and examples of Richardson and Lillo, Diderot early became a staunch defender of the notion that art and ethics are intimately connected in their nature and their purpose, and that the main function of the

former should be to fortify or popularize the latter. This was a very ancient claim, which artists had put forth, as it were in their own defence, almost from the earliest beginnings of the arts. The eighteenth century was not a time in which such a claim could be controverted or ignored. It would have been not only foolhardy and dangerous, but contrary to the whole spirit of a sentimental age to suggest that art might be independent of morality. Thus it is that from the outset Diderot advocated the idea that art should be moral or not be at all; all its suggestions, all esthetic pleasures should tend to "sow the seeds of virtue in our hearts," or "afford topics for moral discussions," like the novels of Richardson.

"Every work of sculpture or painting must be the expression of some great maxim, a lesson for the spectator."—"Two qualities are essential for the artist, morality and perspective."—"I am not a capuchin; yet I confess that I would willingly sacrifice the pleasure of seeing beautiful nude figures, if I could hasten the coming of the day when painting and sculpture, more decent and moral, would think of contributing, together with the other arts, to inspire virtue and purify our manners" (XII, 83, 84).

It was not so much the nude as the *déshabillé* with which Diderot had a quarrel; and in this he represented an important movement which was taking place in the evolution of French taste after 1750. The advent of sensibility and the progress of philosophy were gradually driving out of public favor the amiable levity, the delightfully artificial art of the disciples of Watteau. In condemning the pastorals of Boucher he stood not only for morality, but for the new tendency of public opinion which called for more truth and nature in painting as in the other arts. There was much in the realism of Chardin and in the wonderfully lifelike portraits of La Tour that appealed to him; but his ideal was best realized by Greuze, as is shown by his enthusiastic praises of everything he produced: humble settings, familiar scenes, the faithful imitation of natural objects, pathetic intentions, all the elements that go to the making of a "popular" piece were actually to be found in each of the pictures of Greuze; as Diderot had meant to put them, and thought that he had put them, in his own plays.

Would he have admired the *peinture morale* of Hogarth as well, had he been acquainted with

it? An eminent English critic has rightly judged that, despite the moralizing aim of Hogarth, Diderot would have looked upon his works with feelings akin to horror.<sup>8</sup> Hogarth indeed is essentially satirical, and Diderot hated satire. There is no trace in the English artist of that gentle commiseration, that noble gift of human sympathy which, though it may easily turn into namby-pamby sentiment, is not a feature for which a Diderot or a Greuze need blush.

But Diderot knew nothing of English art. He wrote in his *Salon of 1761*:

"They no longer paint in Flanders. If there are any painters in Italy and Germany, they are more scattered, they have less emulation and encouragement than ours. France then is the only country where this art is still maintained, and even with no small degree of glory" (X, 151).

And again, in 1765:

"I am much mistaken, or the French school, the only one still extant, is still far from its decline" (X, 237).

<sup>8</sup> J. Morley, *Diderot* . . . , vol. II, p. 59.



However, he read at least three contemporary English works of art criticism, and this reading suggested some of his own critical ideas. Hogarth's odd production entitled *The Analysis of Beauty*,<sup>9</sup> Webb's *Inquiry into the Beauties of Painting*,<sup>10</sup> and Spence's *Polymetis*<sup>11</sup> exerted on him that kind of influence which we

<sup>9</sup> W. Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty, written with a view of fixing the fluctuating Ideas of Taste* (1753) rather puzzled the contemporaries. Its purpose was to substitute the criticism of an artist for that of men of letters in matters of art, and to this end gave a commentary on an "oracle" of Lomozzo concerning Michael Angelo: this was mainly a discussion of the respective merits of straight and curved lines in art, and concluded by symbolizing the ideal of beauty under the guise of a certain curve enclosed in a pyramid of glass. This queer figure served as a frontispiece to the book.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Webb, *An Inquiry into the Beauties of Painting, and into the merits of the most celebrated painters, ancient and modern* (1760); dedicated to Spence; reprinted in Webb's *Miscellanies*, 1802.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Spence, *Polymetis, or an Enquiry concerning the agreement between the works of the Roman poets and the remains of the ancient artists, being an attempt to illustrate them mutually from one another* (1747); a series of 21 dialogues. It is well known that Winckelmann's similar study of the beauties of ancient poetry and of the plastic arts, *Von der Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst* (1756), to which Diderot alludes in his *Salon of 1765* (X, 417), was the starting-point of Lessing's *Laocoon*.

have already had occasion to note, and which is characteristic of almost all the influences which Diderot underwent: they made him think, react, and evolve some theories of his own.

He read Webb's *Inquiry* in a manuscript translation<sup>12</sup> and wrote a review of it in 1763. He found it "full of sense, wit, taste, and knowledge, not devoid of *finesse* and grace . . ., a work quite *à la française*." While he agreed with its author regarding the kind of artistic knowledge which should be sought after by true virtuosi or connoisseurs, he was sadly grieved by two things: Webb's neglect of French painters in his enumeration of the masters to be studied, and his bold statement that scenes from the history of Christianity could not compare with mythological subjects for artistic treatment.

For the first of these offences, both Webb and Hogarth were sharply rebuked in Diderot's *Salon* of 1765, in the course of a eulogy of Chardin:

"This man (Chardin) is the foremost colorist in the Salon, and maybe one of the great-

<sup>12</sup> *Extrait d'un ouvrage anglais sur la peinture* (XIII, 33). The translation, by B . . . (Bergier) appeared in 1765, as *Recherches sur les beautés de la peinture*.

est colorists in the whole art of painting. I cannot forgive that impertinent Webb for having written a treatise on art without mentioning one single Frenchman. Nor do I forgive Hogarth either for having said that the French school has not even one mediocre colorist! There you lied, Mr Hogarth! It is either ignorance or platitude on your part. I know full well that your nation has a trick of disdaining an impartial writer who dares to speak of us with praise; but must you basely court your countrymen at the expense of the truth? Paint better, paint better, if you can. Learn how to sketch, and do not write. We and the English have two opposite manias. Ours is to overpraise English productions; theirs is to underrate our own. Hogarth was still living two years ago. He had sojourned in France; and for the last thirty years Chardin has been a great colorist"<sup>13</sup> (X, 303).

These are but petty quarrels of national *amour-propre*. The question of the artistic value of Christian subjects was of more im-

<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere (XI, 349) Diderot refers to Hogarth's *Analysis* and the curious sketches which it contained. Of a certain ugly bust by Le Moyne he says: "Do you know a book by Hogarth entitled the *Line (Analysis) of Beauty*? It is one of the queer figures in that work."—See also below (p. 426) the illustration of the Antinous and the dancing-master.

portance, and was one which could well divide English and French critics. The English entertained at that time (and possibly still entertain to some degree) the neo-classical and somewhat Jansenistic idea which, in spite of the examples of Corneille and Racine, Boileau had expressed in his *Art Poétique*: "The awful mysteries of the Christian faith are not susceptible of fictitious ornaments." But Boileau had in mind the literary treatment of sacred subjects, on the stage and in the epic; he did not for one moment think of banishing from painting and sculpture those innumerable themes which in all Catholic countries had long been drawn from Scripture and the Lives of the Saints. The English critics were more radical, either out of scorn for "Popish superstition," or out of that Puritanic respect for religion which has never allowed Biblical subjects on the English stage. Diderot was not so blinded by his philosophic creed as to share a fastidious dislike which would exclude from the realm of art all the great works which the Christian inspiration has produced in painting, sculpture, architecture, and literature.

In his *Salon of 1763*, he pointed out what

great resources Christianity afforded to artists "in its very crimes" (X, 184-185). Pagan mythology offered more voluptuous forms and scenes; the Christian religion, on the other hand, was rich in great tragedies.<sup>14</sup> In the *Salon of 1765*, he returned to this favorite subject of the artistic value of Christianity with fresh fervor, tempered by philosophic reservations:

"It seems to me that since the pictures with which churches are adorned are made only to engrave the deeds of the heroes of religion in the memory of the people and increase their veneration, it is not indifferent whether they are good or bad. In my opinion, a church painter is a sort of preacher, more clear, striking, intelligible, more readily accessible to the common people than the priest and his curate. These latter speak to ears that are often stopped tight. The picture speaks to the eyes, as does

<sup>14</sup> In this matter Diderot seems to contradict himself, probably under the influence of Webb and Spence, in his very disrespectful comparison of the Pagan with the Christian mythology, two years later (*Essai sur la peinture*, 1765; X, 490-495). But even there he recognizes that Raphael, Guido, Barocci, Titian have created great and beautiful Christian figures. He might have dwelt at greater length on some of the gentler themes, like that of motherhood, which have graced Christian art.

the panorama of nature, which has taught us almost all we know. I go even further: I consider the iconoclasts and contemnors of processions, images, statues, and all the outward pomps of worship, as executioners in the pay of the philosopher weary of superstition; with this difference, that those valets do much more harm to superstition than their master. Abolish all material symbols; what is left will soon be nothing but a metaphysical *galimatias*, which will assume as many odd shapes and turns as there will be heads. . . . Those absurd rigorists do not know the effect of outward ceremonies on the people; they have never seen our Adoration of the Cross on Good Friday, the enthusiasm of the multitude at the procession of Corpus Christi, an enthusiasm by which I am myself carried away sometimes. I have never seen that long file of priests in sacerdotal vestments, those young alcolytes clad in white albs, girt in wide blue sashes, strewing flowers before the Holy Sacrament; that crowd preceding and following them in religious silence; so many men prostrate on the ground; I have never heard that grave, pathetic chant sung by the priests, affectionately answered by numberless men, women, girls, and children, without being stirred in my inmost heart, without tears in my eyes. There is in all this something, I know not what, that is grand, sombre, solemn, and melancholy. I have known a Protestant painter who had

spent a long time in Rome,<sup>15</sup> and who confessed that he had never seen the sovereign pontiff officiating in Saint Peter, in the midst of his cardinals and clergy, without becoming a Catholic. He resumed his religion at the door. 'But, they say, those images and ceremonies lead to idolatry.' It is strange to see dealers in lies fear that the number of falsehoods will increase with the general infatuation for them. My friend, if we prefer the truth to the fine arts, let us pray God for the iconoclasts" (X, 390-391).

Luckily, what Diderot calls "the truth" can tolerate the arts; "philosophy" would have been but a poor sort of creed if it had blinded its adherents to the beauties which religious enthusiasm has created in most lands. Diderot remained an admirer and a defender of the Christian inspiration in art. We see him in 1767 resuming his controversy with his opponents; not only the Protestant Webb this time, but also the Abbé Galiani:

"Webb, an elegant writer and a man of taste, says in his *Reflections on Painting* that subjects drawn from the sacred books or the martyrology

\* Allan Ramsay?—Diderot had dined with him and his family at the house of Van Loo the painter in that year 1765 (*Folland Letters*, Sept. 8, 1765; XLIX, 174).

can never produce a beautiful picture.<sup>16</sup> That man has never seen Le Brun's *Massacre of the Innocents*, nor the same *Massacre* by Rubens, nor the *Descent from the Cross* by Hannibal Carracci, nor *Saint Paul preaching in Athens* by Le Sueur, nor I do not know which apostle or disciple rending the clothes on his breast at the sight of a pagan sacrifice, nor Magdalene wiping the Savior's feet with her beautiful hair, nor the same Saint so voluptuously stretched on the ground in her cave, by Correggio, nor a host of Holy Families, each more touching, beautiful, simple, noble, interesting than the others, nor my Virgin by Barocci, holding on her knees the infant Jesus standing and naked. That writer has not foreseen that he would be asked why Hercules choking the Nemean lion should be beautiful in a picture, while Samson doing the same thing should displease? Why the flaying of Marsyas, but not of Saint Bartholomew, may be painted? Why Christ writing with his finger on the sand the absolution of the adulterous woman, in the midst of the abashed Pharisees, should not be a fine picture, as beautiful as Phryne charged with impiety before the Areopagus? Our friend Galiani, whom I like to hear just as much when he upholds a paradox

<sup>16</sup> He alludes to Webb's Seventh Dialogue (*Of Composition*) in his *Inquiry*, in which Christ armed with a whip is unfavorably compared with Alexander carrying Jove's thunder, and the martyrdom of Saint Andrew with the sacrifice of Iphigenia (*Miscell.*, 1802, pp. 73-74).



as when he proves a truth, thinks like Webb; and he adds that Michael Angelo had felt this, that he had condemned the straight hair, the Jewish beards, the pale, thin, mean-looking, common, traditional features of the apostles, substituting for them the antique character."

Diderot doubts this; but, granting it to be true, he cannot approve that strange confusion (frequent indeed in the Renaissance) which "puts the figure of a man in contradiction with his manners, history, and life." If it is meant that Michael Angelo used to treat sacred subjects according to the proportions of the antique, there is nothing to say, "it is the wise course."

But "to pronounce that the reigning superstition is sterile for art, as Webb claims that it is, is to be ignorant of art and of the history of religion; one must never have seen Bernini's *Saint Theresa*, and that Virgin nursing her playful child naked on her knees;<sup>17</sup> one must have no idea of the pride with which certain fanatic Christians appeared at the foot of the Prætor's tribunals, before the prætorial majesty; of the cold, tranquil ferocity of the priests, and of the lesson derived by me from those compositions, which instruct me better than all the

<sup>17</sup> The "Virgin with the green cushion," by Andrea Solario, in the Louvre.

philosophers in the world concerning the power of men possessed with that sort of demon. Patriotism and theophobia are the sources of great tragedies and terrifying pictures. What! the Christian interrupting a sacrifice, overthrowing altars, smashing gods, insulting the pontiff, braving the magistrate, does not offer a great sight? All this seems to me to be seen through the little spectacles of Anticomania. I am Mr Webb's and the Abbé Galiani's humble servant!" (XI, 344-346).

Thus, because he felt the weakness of that narrow-minded neo-classicism which had then formidable defenders in England in Reynolds and Dr Johnson, Diderot sounded on his "philosophic lyre" the earliest praises of the *beautés du christianisme*, soon to be echoed by Chateaubriand and his Romantic progeny. What Corneille and Racine had done in an apologetic sort of way, he justified by theory, at a time when it was no small credit for a rationalist thus to overcome the prejudices of Rationalism.

He never went so far as to admire the so-called "Gothic" architecture, which Thomas Warton was then timidly but insistently attempting to rescue from undeserved contempt. Yet, in his *Essai sur la peinture* (1765), when

he said just one "word on architecture" (Chapter VI), he outlined a parallel between "the advantages of Greek and Roman architecture and the prerogatives of Gothic architecture"; he was tempted to show "the latter expanding space inside by its high arches and light columns, destroying on the outside the imposing effect of the mass by the multitude and the bad taste of its ornaments, to bring out the analogy between the darkness of its colored windows and the incomprehensible nature of the worshipped Being and the sombre ideas of the worshipper" (X, 510). Had he developed this parallel, there is no doubt that he would have mingled many reflections of a "philosophic" nature with his artistic appreciations; but also, in conformity to his motto,

*Non fumum ex fulgore, sed ex fumo dare lucem*

(Horace, *De Arte Poet.*, V, 143),

he would have given some illuminating criticism on a subject which had inspired so many classical platitudes and was still obscured by prejudiced declamations against Gothic barbarity.

With the neo-classic worship of the ancient

artists, and the rather absurd tradition of that "imitation of nature" which was supposed to have consisted in wisely selecting and harmoniously grouping elements borrowed from reality, he began to quarrel in 1765, and he finally disposed of them in 1767, under the influence of his own reflections, his earlier studies in physiology, and suggestions from Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty* and Garrick's conversation.

In his preceding *Salons* his criticism had been mostly technical, probably owing to his association with artists like Chardin, Greuze, Van Loo, and intelligent amateurs like Grimm and Holbach; or else it had been literary, in the tradition of Du Bos, Batteux, Spence, and the numerous critics who perpetually compared the plastic arts with poetry and poetry with the plastic arts. This literary tendency of Diderot's art criticism, with which he has been very severely reproached, was general at a time when innumerable works of academic art took their themes out of ancient literature; and it was in a sense legitimate when it led to intelligent remarks concerning the composition, the expressions, the gestures of the characters represented. If such a *critique du sujet* and *de la pantomime*

had not been allowed, how could Diderot have challenged the inept composition of the pastorals of Boucher, the preposterous allegories of La Grenée, and hundreds of insipid mythological, historical, fanciful pieces which reflected little credit on the intelligence and the originality of their perpetrators? He was right in energetically denouncing every work, however cleverly executed, which was ill-conceived, fanciful, and falsely classical. Besides, Diderot knew how to be technical, as far as technical criticism is allowed to a man who is not a professional artist, and who writes in a *Correspondance littéraire* designed for an enlightened public, but not for technicians.<sup>18</sup>

To return to his theory of the process of artistic imitation, he first expounded it in his *Salon of 1765*—particularly in the *Essay on Painting* which concluded and supplemented it—and in his *Salon of 1767*. "Nature," he said, "makes nothing incorrect. Every form, whether beautiful or ugly, has its cause; and, among all existing beings, there is not one

<sup>18</sup> See an excellent vindication of Diderot's criticism in M. E. Faguet's *Dix-huitième siècle*, pp. 316 ff. (7th edition).

which is not as it should be" (X, 461). Everything is well formed, well balanced, according to certain laws which we know but imperfectly; organs are shaped by their functions, and all the organs in one body determine and explain one another's form. A blind woman, a hunchback, a pack-carrier, have the same organs as the Antinous, but differently shaped owing to some physiological peculiarities.<sup>19</sup> Then what is *la belle nature*? It is "what fits with circumstances" (III, 485). And what is artificial in the "academic" tradition? It is the disregard of those natural relations, the acceptance of narrow standards of taste, rules derived from the examples of antiquity, mannerisms acquired by copying from models and working from the imagination; it is all that tends "to correct nature" in the name of borrowed ideals.

To give an example of the difference which exists between true gracefulness, natural beauty, and the artificial standards of art, Diderot took his cue from the plate of sketches which Hogarth

<sup>19</sup> Diderot carefully investigated this point (*Letter to M. Petit, the surgeon*; IX, 239;—also XI, 371, etc.), which was intimately connected with his transformistic theories as well as with his art criticism.

had prefixed to his *Analysis of Beauty*. The English artist had represented a ridiculous dancing-master, standing bolt upright, in a stiff attitude, by the side of the Antinous, and pushing his elbow in an attempt to correct his indolent bearing.<sup>20</sup>

"Know what true gracefulness is," says Diderot, "or that true, precise conformity of the limbs with the nature of the action. Above all, do not mistake it for that of the actor or the dancing-master. The gracefulness of action and that of Marcel [a celebrated dancing-master] are in direct opposition. If Marcel were to meet a man standing like the Antinous, he would put one hand under his chin, the other on his shoulder: 'Come now, you awkward booby, is this a proper carriage?' Then, pushing back his knees with his own and lifting him up under the arms, he would add: 'You look as though you were made of wax and ready to melt. Come, you fool, stretch that leg; turn that face

<sup>20</sup> The illustration which struck Diderot was thus explained in the *Analysis* (Chapter VIII, also p. 20), in a discussion of the superstition of straight lines: "If a dancing-master were to see his scholar in the easy and gracefully turned attitude of the Antinous (fig. 6, pl. 1), he would cry shame on him, and tell him he looked as crooked as a ram's horn, and bid him hold up his head as he himself did. See fig. 7, pl. 1."—Diderot several times paraphrased this text: XI, 372, etc.

about; your nose more in the wind.' And, when he had made him into the most insipid *petit-maître*, he would begin to smile at him and applaud himself on his work" (X, 489).

Nature, Diderot would say to art students, was not the professional model, that poor creature hired for the purpose of illustrating artificial attitudes in a school: what is there in common between the man drawing water from a well in the courtyard and the model posing for the same action in a studio? Copy religious devotion in a Carthusian convent; copy anger from your fellow-student when he is truly in a passion; copy woodlands from the woods, M. Louthembourg! "The vaster a composition, the more studies from nature it will require. . . . Ah! if a sacrifice, a battle, a triumph, a public scene could be rendered with the same truth in all its details as a domestic scene by Greuze or Chardin!" (X, 505). Instead of which, painters of historical subjects looked with contempt upon the painters *de genre*. The latter drew less from their imagination, they copied everything from nature, and Diderot loved them for it.

But is everything in nature equally beauti-



ful? Diderot did not think so. He admitted that anything may be imitated, since nothing is intrinsically incorrect; and in this he was a thorough realist. However, some works of art, such as those of classical antiquity, are richer in *relations* than some others; they have more of the inward harmony and the outward suggestiveness in which beauty consists; they make a deeper æsthetic impression. How is this? What is the secret of that charm which is felt in the antique, or in a Michael Angelo?

Hogarth had believed that it consisted in a certain "line of beauty," a peculiar kind of curve which only the very great masters had known how to use. But he had more curiously than convincingly expounded his strange system in the *Analysis of Beauty*. Diderot thought of this book when he wrote, on the subject of beauty:<sup>21</sup> "All that is said about elliptical, circular, serpentine, undulating lines, is absurd. Each part has its line of beauty, and that of the eye is not that of the knee. And even if the undulating line were the line of beauty of the

<sup>21</sup> *Pensées détachées sur la peinture, la sculpture, l'architecture et la poésie* (published 1798), a résumé in aphorisms of most of the theoretical matter to be found in the *Salons*, particularly those of 1765 and 1767.

human body, which are we to prefer among a thousand lines that undulate?" (XII, 124).

The process of artistic imitation is made the object of an illuminating analysis in the opening pages of the *Salon of 1765*. It is not, he says, a mere copying of reality, "portrait work," as he calls it,—photography, as we should say; and, in spite of a venerable tradition, the ancient masterpieces, the Venuses and the Apollos, were not made up with real features copied from various beautiful women or men and harmoniously combined: for how was the ancient artist to know which features were beautiful and which were not? He had no "antiques" to judge by, as we do in our academic routine. It was only through a slow, prolonged series of attempts, corrections, and eliminations, that the "true line of beauty" was found. It is an ideal line, non-existent in nature, for nature does not offer any perfect model: the perfect model of man or woman should be a man or woman eminently fitted for all the functions of life without ever having fulfilled any,—a being which does not exist and never will exist. The academic method of the schools is therefore as bad as the method of

copying nature from artificial models, which is also used in the schools; for copy work, whether from the antique or from nature, is slavish and barren. The method of all great masters is essentially creative: the ideal model, the true line, exists nowhere but in the head of an Agasias, a Raphael, a Poussin, a Falconet. It is discovered and shaped anew by each artist of genius, and for a time it serves as a model to a crowd of minor artists, disciples of the sublime imitators of an ideal nature.

This artistic idealism which Diderot expounds with true eloquence, in 1767, is not without analogy with his *Paradox on the Player*, in which we have seen that his realistic conception of all arts in general, and of the art of acting in particular, was giving way to an idealistic theory represented as being Garrick's own. Indeed here, in the *Salon of 1767*, after the long digression in which Hogarth's line of beauty is discussed, Garrick is again remembered by Diderot:

"The famous Garrick used to say to the Chevalier de Chastellux: 'However sensitive Nature may have made you, if you act only after yourself, or after the most perfect real

nature that you know, you will be nothing but mediocre.' 'Mediocre? Why so?' 'Because for you, for me, for the spectator, there is a certain possible ideal man who, in the given situation, would be affected very differently from you. This is the imaginary being whom you must take for your model. The stronger your conception of him, the greater, the more rare, marvellous, sublime you will be.' 'Then you never are yourself?' 'I take good care not to be. Not myself, Chevalier, nor anything that I exactly know around me. When I rend my heart, when I utter frightful cries, it is not my heart, it is not my cries, but those of another whom I have imagined and who does not exist.'<sup>22</sup> Now, my friend, there is no kind of poet or artist to whom Garrick's lesson does not apply. If you think over and look deeply into this saying of his, you will find that it contains Plato's *secundus a*

<sup>22</sup> The main idea of Diderot's paradox, the differentiation between nature and art, must have been in the air in England as well as in France. Dr Johnson, we are told by Boswell, asked Kemble one day: "'Are you, Sir, one of those enthusiasts who believe yourself transformed into the very character you represent?' Upon Mr. Kemble's answering that he had never felt so strong a persuasion himself; 'To be sure not, Sir, (said Johnson;) the thing is impossible. And if Garrick really believed himself to be that monster, Richard the Third, he deserved to be hanged every time he performed it.''" (Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, edition G. Birkbeck Hill, vol. IV, pp. 243-244, and note; under date 1783).

*natura* and *tertius ab idea*, both the germ and the proof of everything that I have said.<sup>23</sup> The models, the great models, so useful to mediocre men, are very harmful to men of genius" (XI, 9-17).

After 1767, the *Salons* of Diderot became shorter, more descriptive and technical, and less philosophic. His friend Grimm had requested him to be more concise.<sup>24</sup> But we may assume that by 1768 he had reached solutions that seemed satisfactory to him concerning the nature of the beautiful, the relations of art and

<sup>23</sup> A. Fontaine, in his work on *Les doctrines d'art en France—De Poussin à Diderot* (Paris, 1909), Chap. IX, suggests that Diderot's advocacy of idealism against naturalism and academism in the *Salon of 1767* may be in part determined by Winckelmann's influence. This "fanatic of the antique" had been criticized by Diderot in his *Salon of 1765* (X, 417-418). It seems to us that by 1767 at any rate Diderot had freed himself of Winckelmann's influence through his consideration of the theories of Hogarth and Garrick on art.

<sup>24</sup> In the Assézat edition, Diderot's *Salon* for 1759 has 13 pages;—for 1761, 49 pages;—for 1763, 67 pages;—for 1765, 121 pages, and an *Essay on Painting*, 60 pages;—for 1767, 379 pages. Then, for 1769, 76 pages;—for 1771, 81 pages;—for 1775, 23 pages;—for 1781, 42 pages. The *Pensées détachées*, made up of fragments developed or not developed in the *Salons*, extend over 58 more pages.

morality, the fit subjects for artistic treatment, and the general theory of the process of artistic creation. It must be acknowledged that in the two *Salons* in which his "tyrant" (as he pleasantly called Grimm) had allowed him to have his own way, that is, between 1765 and 1768, he had found the means of pricking a good many bubbles of traditional art criticism as he went along, and of correcting the early form of obvious naturalism with which he had set out a few years before.

How his dramatic theories of 1758 would have fared, had he been able to revise them ten years later, it is difficult to imagine. His final pronouncement on the general subject of artistic imitation, as we find it in the *Salon of 1767* and in the *Paradox*, written shortly after, shows that he had altogether forsaken his earlier critical positions. Now the true standard of art, whether in painting, or in sculpture, or in poetry, or in acting, was not reality, that is, sensations, any more than it was an academic tradition. It was a transcendent essence, *quelque chose d'ultérieur à la nature* (XI, 223), "non-existent" of course for a disciple of Locke, yet very real to the inspired artist who created it, set it up

before himself, and strove to materialize it with the means at his disposal.

Concerning poetry, at any rate, Diderot in the latter part of his life gave some hints about what he preferred and what he considered fittest for poetic treatment. He seems to have had from the beginning a rather Romantic conception of what poetry should be; and what acquaintance he gained with English poetry, mostly after 1760, confirmed his prepossessions.

Already in the *Letter on the Deaf and Dumb* (I, 371-372), while praising the French language as the best interpreter of reason and good sense, he had expressed the opinion that it was not as well fitted to express the passions, and that it was a weaker poetic instrument than Greek, Latin, Italian, or English. Besides, French had been impoverished, enervated by the abuse of a so-called "noble language" or poetic diction (I, 388). Supposing however that French had kept all its poetic resources, how could any great outburst of poetry be expected in a highly polished age? Diderot tells us that in his youth he had sometimes felt the poetic spirit stirring within himself (I, 374),

probably at that time when he "was fed with the milk of Homer and the prophets."<sup>25</sup> "Poetry needs something enormous, barbaric, savage," primitive manners and wild nature; its well-springs might be opened again on the morrow of some huge social cataclysm, but not in the refined and artificial age of philosophy (VIII, 370).

To the question: "Is the philosophic spirit favorable or not favorable to poetry?" Diderot unhesitatingly replied that it was not. "There is more poetic spirit (*verve*) among barbaric than among civilized nations; more among the Hebrews than among the Greeks; more among the Greeks than among the Romans; more among the Romans than among the Italians and the French; more among the English than among the latter" (XI, 131). Philosophy and reason drive poetry and imagination out of a country. Superstition, prejudices depart, "and it is incredible what resources poetry loses

<sup>25</sup> Life in the country inspired him in the same way, but too rarely, as is shown by some of his letters from Grandval, or that eloquent page in the *Salon of 1767* on the eternal longing of men cooped up in cities for the country, their true abode: "*O rus, quando te aspiciam?*" (XI, 112).



through unbelief. Manners become civilized; barbaric, poetic, picturesque customs disappear; and this monotonous politeness does incredible harm to poetry" (XI, 131). That is the reason why Pindar is no longer understood, and Milton is despised. Taste is opposed to genius and sublime poetry; classical correctness suppresses the vagaries of the imagination.

England and ancient Greece offer examples of the true, genuine poetic spirit: "Genius and the sublime shine in Shakespeare like flashes of lightning in a long night, while Racine is always beautiful: Homer is full of genius, Vergil of elegance. . . . One dialect did not suffice to supply Homer with the expressions necessary to his genius; Milton at every moment violates the rules of his language,<sup>26</sup> and looks for energetic phrases in three or four different tongues" (XV, 37).

When in 1762 Voltaire began his *Commen-*

<sup>26</sup> Diderot in 1763 sees Milton's "darkness visible" in a certain landscape by Vernet (X, 202). He elsewhere (XVIII, 105) commits a slight blunder when he fancies the blind poet sadly *watching* cartloads of copies of his immortal poem going back to the paper factories. Diderot had a copy of *Paradise Lost* with him in his prison at Vincennes, and filled its margins with notes.

*taira sur Corneille*, in order to provide a dowry for an indigent descendant of the great tragic poet, he made occasional references to Shakespeare, illustrating his criticism of *Médée*, or of *Cinna*, with quotations from *Macbeth*, or from *Julius Cæsar*: this was not intended to establish any comparison between "the wild and pernicious irregularities of Shakespeare" and "the profound judgment of Corneille,"<sup>27</sup> but to show the various resources of two different dramatic traditions. Diderot seems to have thought that Voltaire was a little too lukewarm in his praise of Shakespeare: "Confess that Shakespeare is indeed a very extraordinary man. There is not one of those scenes which, with a little talent, could not be made into a great thing. Would it not be a fine beginning for a tragedy to have two senators upbraiding a debased rabble for the applause which they have just been lavishing on their tyrant? And then what a rapid flow! what harmony!" (XIX, 465). It has become a sort of tradition in literary history that Diderot undertook to defend the fame of

<sup>27</sup> Voltaire, *Œuvres*, Moland edition, vol. XXXI, p. 343, commentary on *Cinna*. Diderot's letter to Voltaire, which deals mostly with the difficulties of the *Encyclopédie*, was written Sept. 29, 1762.

Shakespeare against Voltaire, "the sworn enemy of pedestals."<sup>28</sup> But his praise of Shakespeare seems mild enough when we see how careful he is not to commit himself too far, and what contemporaries he classes with the great English playwright: "I consider Sedaine as one of the great-grandchildren of Shakespeare, that Shakespeare whom I shall not compare with the Apollo of the Belvedere, or the Gladiator, or the Antinous, or Glycon's Hercules, but rather with the Saint Christopher of Notre-Dame, a shapeless, rudely carved colossus, yet between whose legs we might all pass without touching him" (VIII, 384). He regretted that both Sedaine and Shakespeare had lacked a classical education. Yet at the same time he admired Shakespeare's power not only in his mob scenes, but in those very "butcheries"

<sup>28</sup> Thus Diderot, in a curious vindication of Voltaire (1769) against a certain Abbé Chaudon (VI, 351 ff.).—Diderot's comparison of Shakespeare with Saint Christopher is also found in his letter of Dec. 18, 1776, to François Tronchin (printed in H. Tronchin, *Le Conseiller François Tronchin*, Paris, 1895, p. 227);—also in Métra's *Correspondance*, 2d edition, 1787, vol. VI, p. 425, in a conversation between Diderot, Voltaire and Madame Denis, of which it is difficult to say where it might have taken place.

which an over-delicate and over-sensitive nation would not permit: why then, he said, let us be logical, and exclude the Greek *Œdipus*, *Philoctetes*, the *Eumenides*, from polite literature (VIII, 393). When Ducis offered an improved and polished Shakespeare to French audiences, Diderot had enough sense to prefer the rude original.

This is because he was more responsive to the suggestive power of poetry than to any classical regularity or correctness. His admiration sprang from emotional rather than intellectual sources. Darkness, terror, melancholy seemed to him more poetical than light, mirth and happy moods.

“Light (*la clarté*) is good to convince; it has no power to move. Light, or clearness, howsoever we understand it, is inimical to enthusiasm. Poets, talk always of eternity, infinity, immensity, time, space, divinity, tombs, Manes, hell, dark skies, deep seas, dim forests, thunder, flashes rending the clouds. Be dark. Great noises heard from afar, waterfalls heard and unseen, silence, solitude, the desert, ruins, caverns, the sound of veiled drums beaten at intervals, the strokes of a bell slowly tolling and awaited by the ear, the screech of night birds, the howls of wild beasts in winter, during the

night, particularly when mingled with the murmur of the winds . . . there is in all these things I know not what that is awful, great and dark" (XI, 147).

Such a passage clearly points the way to all the themes of pre-romantic and romantic poetry. It is not surprising that the names of Milton, Gray, Young, and Ossian are mentioned almost immediately after this suggestive page in the *Salon of 1767*.

Diderot seems to have become widely acquainted, between 1760 and 1770, with some of the most original aspects of English poetry in his age, probably through Hoop, Garrick, and other friends.<sup>29</sup> In October 1761, he was send-

<sup>29</sup> Hoop for the Scottish songs, and perhaps for Ossian; Garrick for Gray. Diderot's paragraph on Ossian, which we quote, may have been prompted by the reading of *Conlath and Cuthona*.—It is interesting to compare with Diderot's enthusiastic appreciation the gruff comments of Johnson in his *Life of Gray*: "In 1757, he published the *Progress of Poetry* and *The Bard*, two compositions at which the readers of poetry were at first content to gaze in mute amazement. Some that tried them confessed their inability to understand them, though Warburton said that they were understood as well as the works of Milton and Shakespeare, which it is the fashion to admire. Garrick wrote a few lines in their praise. Some hardy champions undertook to rescue them from

ing *Shylvic and Vinivela* and other Scottish songs to Sophie Volland, remarking that there reigned in those pieces a taste which "confounded" him (XIX, 67). In 1767, he exulted in reading the song of Gray's *Bard*, and some of the Macpherson poems, which with most of his contemporaries he took to be genuine:

"Ossian, a chief, a warrior, a poet, and a musician, hears in the night the trees murmuring around his abode; he rises, he cries: 'Souls of my friends, I hear you; you upbraid me for my silence.' He takes up his lyre, he sings; and, after he has sung, he says: 'Souls of my friends, now you are immortal; be then satisfied, and let me rest.' In his old age, a Bard asks to be led among the graves of his children; he sits down, lays both his hands on the cold stone which covers their ashes, and sings of them. Meanwhile the air, or rather the wandering souls of his children, caressed his face and his long beard. O beautiful manners! O beautiful poetry!" (XI, 181-182).

neglect, and in a short time many were content to be shewn beauties which they could not see."

Johnson's *Life of Savage*, translated by Le Tourneur in 1771, was described by Diderot in his review of it (IX, 451) as "a book which would have been delightful, if the English author had proposed to satirize his hero; but unfortunately he is in earnest."

In 1771 he reviewed Le Tourneur's translation (1769) of Young's *Night Thoughts*, "a poem of the finest black dye that you could possibly imagine, which the translator has been clever enough to make readable for a nation whose mind is rosy-colored. It is true that this tint is beginning to fade" (IX, 451). As Grimm had not shown much warmth in recommending Young's poem to the readers of the *Correspondance littéraire*, Diderot finely took him to task (June, 1770): "You must say that the *Night Thoughts* are a great book. Is it nothing to have succeeded in making a frivolous, gay nation like ours relish jeremiads?" (XX, 13). Thomson, whose *Life* by Johnson Diderot reviewed, was more harshly treated.<sup>30</sup> Diderot saw in him a mere neo-classic, and crushed the English *Seasons* with the Latin *Georgics*, Thomson with Vergil: "His Muse is like Notre-Dame de Lorette, while the Muse of Vergil is a Venus. . . . Thomson is a corrupter of taste" (IX, 451). He would have said of Thomson's *Seasons* what he said of the pastorals

\* It is to be wished that Thomson should no longer be described as "auteur des *Nuits* d'Young," as he is in the *Index* of the latest edition of Diderot's works.

of Gessner and of Léonard: "Those rustic manners do not exist anywhere in the world; it is all false; but if you admit the possibility of such country people, everything is true. . . . I am like the children; I never discuss the foundation of a tale which amuses me" (VI, 418). Unfortunately, Thomson's pastorals failed to amuse him, and that is why he was as hard to him as he had been to Boucher.<sup>31</sup>

"O the poets, the poets!" the philosopher sometimes exclaims. "Plato knew what he was doing when he drove them out of his republic. They have not any right ideas about anything. Interpreting falsehood and truth alternately, their enchanting jargon infects a whole nation, and twenty volumes of philosophy are less read and accomplish less good than one of their songs does harm" (VI, 414).

This brief consideration of some of Diderot's cursory judgments on English poets shows that what interested him most in English poetry was

<sup>31</sup> Occasional references to Dryden, Swift, Prior, Milton, Pope, are to be found in various parts of Diderot's *Œuvres* as we know them, which sufficiently show that he was as widely read in English poetry as any of his French contemporaries. It would have been unprofitable to mention all these references here, and only the most significant have been used.



not the neo-classical tradition, the academism of poetry, which he found in Pope and in Thomson, but the new spirit, the new sources of emotion which were soon to become known as the sources of Romantic inspiration. His favorite English poets were exactly those whom Samuel Johnson was most unwilling or most unable to appreciate. It is truly curious to see two men so eminently representative of their respective countries during the latter half of the eighteenth century, and each of whom seems to have carefully avoided mentioning the other by name, judge English poetry from two absolutely opposite standpoints: the English critic, from the classical rules which had been framed in seventeenth-century France; the French philosopher, in the spirit of the independent poetic tradition of England which was being revived by the "school of Milton" and the English Pre-romanticists. Johnson harked back to the artistic gospel of the past; Diderot hailed with enthusiasm the inspirations of the future. If Beauty is not, any more than Truth, a fixed quantity, an immutable essence, an innate sort of light, "of the Eternal co-eternal beam," and if the reason why it has for so long eluded the

attempts made to grasp it within definitions is, that being an ideal it follows for ever the evolution of the human mind, the most thankless as well as the most harmful undertaking of criticism may be to try and abide by "a fixed faith and constant axioms." Diderot preferred to open his mind wide to all influences, and to forestall the tastes and the beliefs of posterity.

## CONCLUSION

DIDEROT, who dearly loved paradoxes, for the soul of truth which they contain, might have liked to hear about "Diderot the most German ✓ of all the French," and "Diderot the Englishman." In truth, if we consider his temperament and habits of thought, he appears as "eminently French, a Frenchman of the Centre, of Champagne or Burgundy, of the Seine or the Marne, and he was *par excellence* a Frenchman of the middle-class."<sup>1</sup> Like many other French citizens who are loath to stir from home, he was lavish in his enthusiastic praise of the foreign nations concerning which he knew nothing but by hearsay, and which he was content to admire on trust: "Look at England!" these worthy people exclaim; "look at the United States!" or at any other distant country that happens to serve their purpose. This gives weight to an argument, for men readily believe much about lands which they have not seen: *major a*

<sup>1</sup> E. Faguet, *Dix-huitième siècle*, 7th edition, 1890, p. 279.

*longinquo reverentia.* And this panegyrist of English virtue, boldness, and liberty, is Diderot as he generally appears in his works. To him, as to Voltaire, the adversaries of the philosophic propaganda must have often said: "You are always quoting the English to us, it is the rallying-cry of the philosophers."<sup>2</sup> But Diderot, in his letters and his conversation, was more reserved and reticent than in his works, on the subject of England; his enthusiasm sometimes wavered, and he willingly relied on the testimony of other people. It was not possible for him, as it was for Voltaire, to boast that he had discovered England for the French; and consequently he never set himself up as an oracle on English things.

This little French *bourgeois*, however, was "a fine genius, to whom nature had given great wings," and even "a transcendent genius which had no equal in his age."<sup>3</sup> Curious of everything that came from the nation which was

<sup>2</sup> Voltaire, *Dialogues chrétiens*, "Premier dialogue, entre un prêtre et un encyclopédiste;" Moland edition, vol. XXIV, p. 132.

<sup>3</sup> Diderot was thus characterized by Voltaire and by Rousseau; quoted by E. Bersot, *Etudes sur le XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 1855, vol. II, p. 147.

the first in modern times to free human thought from the threats of the law, he read many English books, meditated much over his reading; and thus it came about, through this vast book-knowledge as well as through his warm praises of England, that by his contemporaries he was considered as a kind of authority on English thought. He owed a great many suggestions to English philosophy and English literature; but, from a cosmopolitan point of view, it is a question whether English writers were not eventually more indebted to him than he had been to them.

Diderot was a very active agent in the diffusion of English thought. Of all the kinds of intellectual action which comparative literature brings under the rather vague designation of "influence," there is scarcely one of which Diderot does not afford some example in his relations with English writers of every description. The history of his indebtedness to them may be said to have begun with translations, to have continued with adaptations, then with "continuations," digressions, manifold reminiscences, and occasional criticisms. From the time when he was doing hack-work for the Parisian booksellers, to the days when he was acknowl-

edged as a great representative of eighteenth-century philosophy, a Father of the yet unnamed Positivistic Church, he indefatigably worked for the propagation of many scientific, philosophic, and literary ideas of English origin, not only through translations and imitations, but, what was infinitely more interesting and fruitful, by a large number of original works in which the foreign suggestions served as nuclei for fertile developments, or as starting-points for bold generalizations which soared far beyond them. Thus he vastly increased the intrinsic wealth of what he borrowed, while broadening his personality. Our outline of his intellectual biography in relation to England has therefore aimed not merely at tracing evidences of direct discipleship, but also at describing a series of interesting reactions under the foreign influence.

Had he not been endowed with great original power as well as with an exceptional faculty of assimilation, his connection with England would not be of much more importance to us than that of many other English scholars of his age and country,<sup>4</sup> Desfontaines, Eidous, Toussaint, La

<sup>4</sup> Some of these however contributed not a little to the modification of the French literary taste and standards: see Mary G. Cushing, *P. Le Tourneur*, New York, 1909.

Place, Madame Riccoboni, and a score more of obscure abbés, poor scribblers, unsuccessful actresses, all sedulous day-laborers in the field of letters. He might have gone on translating Grecian Histories, Medicinal Dictionaries, Essays on Virtue, Cyclopædias, English plays, and secured for himself an honorable, inconspicuous place among the people who in each age have tried to make the intellectual wealth of one nation accessible to another. Instead of this, the history of his connection with English thought is one of gradual emancipation. In the space of approximately twenty years, between 1745 and 1763 or 1765, the translator of English books became a powerful interpreter of English ideas; and, thanks to the great prestige which the French language and literature enjoyed in Europe, he was able to effect a wider and deeper diffusion of those ideas than any of his contemporaries could have done. Fairly submissive to the influence of his first masters, Shaftesbury and Bacon, fervid to a fault in his intense admiration for them and for Richardson, he asserted more independence in his activity as a dramatist—and this is perhaps a matter for regret: for, if instead of merely

pointing to the dramas of Lillo and Moore for a justification of his timely reaction against the dramatic tradition of France, he had boldly attacked the problems of the Shakespearean dramaturgy, if he had given half as much attention and sympathy to the art of Shakespeare as he had done to the art of Richardson or to the ethics of Shaftesbury, and displayed the same ingenuity in bringing out the hidden merits of *Hamlet* as in vindicating the beauties of *Clarrissa Harlowe*, he would have done more for literature in general and for himself than by inventing the *genre sérieux*. In the novel, it has seemed to us that, while more or less reminiscent of Richardson and Sterne, he followed an independent vein, trying to derive his material either from reality or from philosophy—a philosophy both practical and theoretical, combative and speculative. Lastly, in criticism, a portion of his work which in spite of its lack of consistency is of great value,<sup>5</sup> all the English influences that were brought to bear upon him, save that of Garrick alone, resulted in opposition on

<sup>5</sup> Diderot introduced *life* into criticism: see Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries du lundi*, vol. III, and G. Saintsbury, *History of Criticism*, vol. III, Chap. IV.)



his part. Yet, even while his mind became more and more detached from England, both through his gradual disenchantment concerning the "Philosophic Country" and through the clearer consciousness which he had acquired of his own powers, it is to be noted that Diderot hailed such poets as Young, Gray, and "Ossian" with great enthusiasm, as though he discerned in their writings the promise of a wonderful poetic harvest for the future.

It would be exceedingly difficult to determine what Diderot accomplished on the whole for *les idées anglaises*, that is, for the spirit of liberty in matters of philosophy and literature. All the English ideas which interested this very French intellect received from it a new life and a radical form. How far this transformation assisted their progress in continental Europe, what was gained for the Positivistic tendencies — of Bacon, Locke, and Shaftesbury, for the Real- — ism of Lillo and Richardson, by the advocacy of the enthusiastic philosopher, cannot be definitely expressed. It is beyond doubt that he contributed a great deal to the fame of Shaftesbury and of Richardson outside of England, that he initiated the worship for Bacon, and that he

gave to the moral English drama of the eighteenth century a European reputation which it might never have obtained through its own deserts. "*Tout s'exagère, tout s'enrichit un peu dans ma pensée et dans mon discours*" (XI, 115). His mind acted as a great focus of concentration and irradiation; thus it is that he appears not only as eminently representative of his age, but as a forerunner of several currents of human thought which were followed up in later ages.

The very success of the main ideas for which he stood, the wide acceptance which they received in Europe in the nineteenth century, may have prevented him from obtaining the share of credit which he expected from posterity. To modern readers of his works, there is apparently no very great *hardiesse* in contending that psychology should be studied empirically; that the foundation of ethics is essentially social, and that right living is not inseparable from a given set of "right beliefs"; that the ethical as well as the religious creeds vary in different forms of society, and that none of them can claim to be absolutely the best; that toleration therefore must reign everywhere; that the greatest riddle

of all, for a mind unenlightened by supernatural agencies, is not so much the existence of God and His relations with man and the present order of the world, as the universe itself, its past transformations, the nature and the origin of life, and the relations between animate and inanimate nature. At the close of a highly positive and utilitarian age, such as the nineteenth century has been, there is nothing very new in the idea that metaphysical systems, however sublime they may be, are of less value to man than experimental sciences and their applications; that the human intellect does not lose in dignity by applying itself to act on matter instead of merely analyzing itself; that manual labor deserves much respect; and that a compendium of human knowledge, an encyclopedia, should devote more space to the description of the useful arts in their present state than to the curiosities of their history. Lastly, there is nothing very startling for us in the denunciation of the errors of Pseudo-Classicism and Academism, when even the gospels of Romanticism, Realism, and Naturalism have in their turn been denounced, controverted, and finally laid to rest.

It remains true, nevertheless, that in almost

every field of human thought Diderot "placed himself at the point of view whence, more comprehensively than was possible from any other, he discerned the long course and the many bearings, the complex faces and the large ramifications, of the huge movement of his day. . . . To whatever quarter he turned, he caught the rising illumination and was shone upon by the spirit of the coming day. It was no copious and overflowing radiance, but they were the beams of the dawn."<sup>6</sup>

Complicated as the question of Diderot's influence on his age in France and abroad is made by the transformation which every idea underwent in his seething intellect, obscured as it is also by the diffused nature of his action and by the vast number of forces which acted from other quarters in the same directions, the problem seems to be made more difficult still for the student of literary history by the manner in which Diderot's most important works saw the light. A large part of his writings appeared posthumously. His contemporaries knew him mainly as the editor of the *Encyclopédie*, the originator of a system of dramatic reforms

\* John Morley, *Diderot* . . . , vol. I, p. 309.

which did not seem to be bearing much fruit, and the author of a few ill-digested philosophic *fantaisies* of which the less said the better. Some of his most interesting works were never intended by him for publication; they were first printed in the very last years of the eighteenth and at various times throughout the nineteenth century. Of Diderot one may truly say, as of Pascal, Madame de Sévigné, and Saint-Simon, that we know him much better than his contemporaries ever did, and that consequently he will for ever puzzle the constructions of "evolutionistic" criticism. "It should be clearly known," says Brunetière emphatically, "that Diderot's contemporaries were not able to read his *Religieuse*, nor the *Neveu de Rameau*, nor the *Rêve de D'Alembert*, nor the *Salons*. . . ."

It is true; and yet not absolutely true. For, if the public at large was not able to read *Jacques le Fataliste*, for instance, before 1796, or *D'Alembert's Dream* before 1830, or the whole collection of the *Salons* before 1877, there was a body of privileged readers, not at all small

<sup>1</sup> Brunetière, *Manuel de l'hist. de la litt. franç.*, 1898, p. 326, in the notes.—For the chronology of Diderot's main works, see Appendix II.

or unimportant, which became acquainted with many of Diderot's most curious works in manuscript form long before they were printed. The manuscripts of this "*diable d'homme*" had a long and eventful career. When Diderot died, they were scattered everywhere, in the hands of the Parisian police, in the iron safe of the French king, among the papers of Grimm, Naigeon, Mme de Vandeul, in the libraries of the king of Prussia, of various German princes, of the empress of Russia; and, what was more important, they were read by Lessing, Schiller and Goethe, and highly praised by them. "Diderot is Diderot," Goethe wrote, "a peculiar individuality; whoever holds him or his doings cheaply is a Philistine, and the name of them is legion. Men know neither from God, nor from Nature, nor from their fellows, how to receive with gratitude what is valuable beyond appraisement."<sup>8</sup>

Is it because of this favorable reception in Germany, where he seems to have early become

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in J. Morley, *Diderot* . . . , vol. I, pp. 7-8.— See F. Papillon, *Des rapports philosophiques de Goethe et de Diderot*, in *Travaux de l'Académie des sciences morales et politiques*, 1874, vol. 101, pp. 245 ff.

more famous than he was at home, that Diderot rather suffered at the hands of some French critics in the latter part of the nineteenth century? Is it because he was such "a peculiar individuality," an anti-classicist, a romanticist, a positivist, a realist, and, taken all together, an antagonist of every kind of tradition, that he irritated Brunetière as much as he had disgusted Carlyle? It would be too long to trace the "history of the variations" of criticism, and particularly of French criticism, in relation to Diderot. One great reason at least stands out which explains why he has often been held cheap by his own countrymen: his genius had more power than lucidity and coherence; he thought like a prophet rather than like a philosopher, and he wrote like an inspired orator rather than like a stylist. The philosophy of Voltaire has been unkindly described as "a chaos of clear ideas"; the philosophy of Diderot is a chaos of ideas that are seldom very clear—"ce sont des idées qui sont devenues ivres et qui se sont mises à courir les unes après les autres," said the Chevalier de Chastellux. Diderot's fire is often obscured with a good deal of smoke; and this is

a failing which French criticism will seldom condone.

But, even when we acknowledge, as Diderot himself repeatedly did with expressions of regret, that he had sometimes allowed his imagination too much liberty, that he had trifled with his higher gifts or too liberally put them at the service of other men, when we wish that he had concentrated his powers, and written less but with greater care, are we sure that such a discipline could have been of great advantage to him? Is it certain that if Diderot had been a more scrupulous and less prolific writer he could have done better than he has done, or even as well? He was excellent in improvisation, but there are good reasons to believe that in his case the *limæ labor* gave but poor results. He could be a brilliant journalist, a reviewer, an orator, but scarcely a great writer. What is most admired in his works, that is, his philosophic dialogues, his Salons, his short stories, his letters, is what cost him the least labor; while his painstaking attempts in dramatic literature have produced nondescripts which are well nigh execrable.



Unfortunately, it is from this viewpoint of the drama that many eminent literary critics have taken their surveys of Diderot as a whole. Philosophic critics have founded their estimates of him partly on the consideration of his moral theories—a treacherous quicksand, to say the least. But then Diderot is not essentially a dramatist, or a moralist, notwithstanding what he and his contemporaries may have thought about it. His work in those fields has been mostly critical and destructive. The constructive, positive side of his genius proved most successful in science, or rather in two distinct branches of scientific thought which are not identical with scientific research: he initiated the popularization of science and its applications through the *Encyclopédie*; and, from the data of science in his time, he made some interesting generalizations which resulted in a metaphysical theory of man and the universe, known to-day as Transformism.

“They are happy men,” Bacon had said,<sup>9</sup> “whose natures sort with their vocations; otherwise they may say, *Multum incola fuit anima mea*, when they converse in those things they do

<sup>9</sup> Bacon, *Essays*, No. 38, “Of Nature in Men.”

not affect." Diderot, if we believe him, was not a happy man in this respect: he had against his wish been forced to dwell in many intellectual regions which he would fain have left to others. Yet when we consider how from the beginning of his career he had shown the greatest variety of interest, and how in his later years he never took up any topic of science, art, philosophy, or literature without infusing new life into it and making it more fruitful than it was before, it seems as though his greatest gift had been a wonderful ability to make his nature sort with almost any vocation. Men whose minds are methodical, and inclined to be dogmatic, for whom there is no doubt concerning the unity and immutability of truth, and who have been so happy as to hit upon this truth once and for all time, will always be disappointed and irritated by Diderot. Other men, who, after Diderot's example, look in books only for inspiration, for suggestiveness, for the fine page which is full of power, will not be tempted to reproach him with his versatility, or to characterize him with the less creditable traits of his rich and exuberant nature. We have seen how varied his mind was in its aspects, how open to every

influence. Many of his ideas seem prophetic, because they were developed out of suggestions pregnant with potential truth. It was through this broadness of mind, this interest in other men's opinions, this curiosity of foreign thought and particularly of English thought, that he succeeded in transcending his age.

FINIS.

## APPENDIX I

### A. A LETTER FROM VOLTAIRE TO G. KEATE

(The following letter, which at the time it was copied was among the British Museum MSS exhibits, is not included in the Moland edition of the Works of Voltaire, and we are not aware of its having been published anywhere else.)

Had I not fix'd the seat of my retreat in the free corner of Geneva, I would certainly live in the free kingdom of England, for, tho I do not like the monstrous irregularities of Shakespear, tho I admire but some lively and masterly strokes in his performances, yet I am confident nobody in the world looks with a greater veneration on your good philosophers, on the croud of your good authors, and I am these thirty years the disciple of your way of thinking. Your nation is at once a people of warriours and of philosophers. You are now at the pitch of glory in regard to publick affairs. But I know not whether you have preserv'd the reputation your island enjoy'd in point of litterature when Addison, Congreve, Pope, Swift, were alive. However you kan not be so low as we are. Poor France at the present time has neither navy or money, nor plate nor fame, nor witt. We are at the ebb of all.

I have read the life of Mad<sup>e</sup>. de Pompadour printed at London. Indeed, S<sup>r</sup>., 't is a scurrilous book, I assure you that there is not one page of truth.

Pray, in case some good book appears into y<sup>r</sup>. world, let me be informed of it. Adieu, mon cher jeune philosophe. Je compte sur votre souvenir et je vous aimerai toujours.

Y<sup>r</sup>. for ever

VOLTAIRE.

aux Délices, 16 janvier 1760.

#### B. LETTERS FROM DIDEROT TO DAVID HUME

(Reprinted from J. H. Burton, *Letters of Eminent Persons addressed to David Hume*, Edinburgh, 1849, pp. 280-287. Numerous corrections are made, from the collation by Mr H. W. Meikle, to whom we here again express our thanks. We have modernized the spelling, except for proper names.)

##### 1

Si le mauvais succès des services que vous avez rendus, monsieur et très honoré philosophe, ne vous a point dégoûté de la bienfaisance,<sup>1</sup> vous ne serez point offensé de la liberté que je prends de vous recommander celui qui aura l'honneur de vous remettre cette lettre. C'est un homme auquel Mad<sup>e</sup> Diderot s'intéresse. C'est un parent de ses amis. C'est un honnête homme qui ne s'expatrie avec sa famille avec aucun motif qui soit répréhensible. Faites pour lui tout ce que vous attendriez de moi pour quelqu'un que vous m'auriez adressé, et à qui je pourrais être utile. Faites qu'il tire parti de ce qu'il peut avoir de talent. Faites qu'il vive, lui, sa

<sup>1</sup> An allusion to Hume's quarrel with Rousseau, 1766.

femme, qui est la meilleure femme du monde, et son enfant, qui a du courage et de la raison fort au delà de la mesure de son âge. Très aimé et très honoré David, vous savez bien qu'il n'y a aucune loi civile ni religieuse qui ait rompu ni pu rompre le lien de fraternité que nature a établi entre tous les hommes. Vous savez aussi que ce lien nous attache encore d'une manière plus indispensable et plus sacrée aux malheureux qu'aux autres. Secourez, donc, de votre mieux celui que je vous adresse. Comme vous n'êtes pas moins excellent homme qu'excellent auteur, vous penserez avec moi, qui n'ai que la moitié de ce mérite, qu'après tout, le soir, quand on se retire et qu'on cause avec soi, on est encore plus content d'une bonne action que d'une belle page.<sup>2</sup> Je vous salue et vous embrasse de tout mon cœur; et je suis, avec estime et vénération, monsieur et très honoré philosophe, votre très humble et très obéissant serviteur, Paris, ce 24 9<sup>bre</sup> [1767].<sup>3</sup>

DIDEROT.

2

PARIS, ce 22 février 1768.

Je ne suis pas mort, monsieur et très honoré David; il vous reste toujours un ami et un admirateur sincère à Paris. Mais j'ai beaucoup souffert d'une humeur goutteuse qui a commencé à se faire sentir au bras gauche, qui s'est métamorphosée successive-

<sup>2</sup> Comp. Diderot, *Œuvres Complètes*, III, 539.

<sup>3</sup> We infer this to be the date from the reference to the same affair of the Neufvilles in February, 1768 (see next letter).

ment en mal de poitrine, en douleur d'estomac, colique d'entrailles, et finalement en une effroyable fluxion d'oreilles, qui m'a détenu presque tout le mois de janvier au coin du feu, sans pouvoir travailler, et, qui pis est, sans pouvoir reposer ni dormir. J'en suis quitte pour une surdité d'un caractère tout particulier. J'entends très bien ceux qui parlent, mais je parle si bas que les autres ont peine à m'entendre. Le son de ma voix retentit si fortement dans ma tête caverneuse et sonore, que, pour peu qu'il soit fort, je m'étourdis moi-même.

C'est la série de ces indispositions qui m'a empêché de vous remercier des marques d'humanité que vous avez données à mes pauvres concitoyens. Ne vous découragez pas. Cette pauvre femme, qui a si peu mérité son triste sort, m'en fait une peinture si affligeante que je n'ose pas relire sa lettre. On ne lui a pas conseillé le voyage d'Angleterre; elle y a été appelée par un époux qu'elle s'est fait un devoir de suivre, au hasard de toutes les nouvelles peines auxquelles elle pourrait s'exposer. Je vous réponds de son honnêteté et de ses mœurs. D'ailleurs, mon cher philosophe, je m'en rapporte là-dessus à votre propre tact. Vous qui savez si bien lire dans les âmes de ceux qui ont joué quelque rôle sur la scène du monde, vous devez aussi savoir interroger celles qui se démènent autour de vous. Frappez à celle-là, et vous n'en ferez rien sortir qui ne vous plaise et ne vous intéresse. Elle emportait avec elle, pour toute pacotille, quelques petits talents qui se trouvent presque inutiles à Londres. Ne verrons-nous jamais

finir ces aversions nationales qui resserrent dans un petit espace l'exercice de la bienfaisance? Et qu'importe qu'un homme soit né en deçà ou en delà d'un détroit, en est-il moins un homme? n'a-t-il pas les mêmes besoins? n'est-il pas exposé aux mêmes peines, avide du même bonheur? Fais donc pour lui tout ce qu'il est en droit d'attendre de toi sur une infinité de rapports immuables, éternels, et indépendants de toutes les conventions. Je trouve Polifème plus excusable d'avoir mangé les compagnons d'Ulysse, que la plupart de ces petits Européens, qui n'ont que cinq pieds et demi, et deux yeux, qui se ressemblent en tout, et qui ne s'en dévorent pas moins. Mon cher David, vous êtes de toutes les nations, et vous ne demanderez jamais au malheureux son extrait baptistaire. Je me flatte d'être, comme vous, citoyen de la grande ville du monde. Mais trêve de philosophie. Trouvez un trou à M. de Neufville. Cherchez à sa femme quelque niche où elle puisse travailler, s'occuper, subsister, faire subsister son enfant, et secourir son mari. Je vous le répète, j'y prends intérêt. Si vous revenez jamais parmi nous, je vous présenterai à Mad<sup>e</sup> Diderot qui joint ses remerciements aux miens, et qui vous baisera sur vos deux larges joues Bernardines. Vos commerçants avec leur secret de commerce me font mourir de rire. Vous verrez qu'un particulier leur fera un dommage qu'il n'est pas au pouvoir de toute une nation ennemie de leur faire;<sup>a</sup> et puis ne faut-il faire aucun

<sup>a</sup> It is probable that London business men had refused to give work to M. de Neufville on account of his foreign nationality.



fond sur la probité d'un homme qu'on tire de la misère, et à qui l'on a donné du pain sur la garantie de deux honnêtes gens? Je vous fais mon compliment sur la cessation de vos fonctions publiques.' Revenez, revenez vite, mon cher philosophe, à vos livres—à vos occupations. Je vous aime bien mieux le fouet à la main, faisant justice de tous les célèbres brigands qui ont troublé votre contrée, brisant une statue, en élevant une autre, qu' exposé à partager les forfaits des rois et de leurs ministres. Continuez votre histoire—ne la continuez pas.' Sondez les replis du coeur humain en moraliste. Examinez les ressorts déliés de son entendement en subtil métaphysicien. Faites tout ce qu'il vous plaira—quelque chose que vous fassiez, vous servirez votre espèce en général, ce qui est bien plus digne de vous que de n'en servir qu'une bien petite portion. Il est peut-être très possible d'être un bon citoyen, sans être un fort méchant homme: n'allez pas prendre un engourdissement momentané pour une perclusion. Il est vrai que j'ai toujours conservé l'amour du travail; mais cet amour est devenu infructueux par des distractions continues auxquelles la bonté de mon âme ne m'a jamais permis, et ne me permettra jamais, de me refuser. Je ne sais si j'ai tort, mais le temps me paraît mieux employé pour un autre qui me le

'Hume's connection with the Home Office ceased in 1767.

'J. H. Burton found this passage obscure. Diderot evidently means that either as a historian, or as a moralist, or as a metaphysician, Hume cannot fail to "serve his species."

demande que pour moi. J'aurai toujours le temps d'écrire, et je saisis avec empressement le moment de bien faire. Mais, mon cher David, je ne pense pas à l'homme de la philosophie. Je me suis précipité dans des questions abstruses d'un genre tout différent, et je voudrais bien m'en tirer. J'aime les occupations qui ne compromettent pas le repos. Il faut craindre les derniers mouvements convulsifs d'un animal féroce blessé à mort.\* J'ai vu une fois en ma vie, le dernier effort de la jambe d'un chevreuil casser la jambe du chasseur qui l'avait tiré. Le fanatisme aux abois est bien une autre bête. Vous croyez notre intolérance plus favorable aux progrès de l'opinion humaine que votre liberté presque illimitée. Cela se peut. Les D'Holbach, Helvétius, Morellet, Suard, qui ne sont pas tout à fait de votre avis, du moins à en juger par leurs discours et leurs écrits, n'en sont pas moins sensibles à votre souvenir. Si vous nous regrettez aussi sincèrement que vous l'êtes de nous, venez nous revoir. Que faites-vous de Jean-Jacques? On dit qu'il nous quitte pour aller à Londres faire imprimer ses mémoires. Si cet ouvrage est court, il sera mauvais. Plus il aura de volumes, moins il parlera de lui; meilleur il sera. Je redoute le moment où un homme qui aime tant le bruit, qui connaît si peu les égards, qui a été lié si intimement avec une infinité de gens, publiera un pareil ouvrage, surtout avec l'art qu'il a de flétrir adroitement, d'obscurcir, d'altérer, de faire suspecter plus encore en louant

\* Compare a similar passage in *Lettres à Falconet; Œuvres Complètes*, XVII, 265.

qu'en blâmant.<sup>28</sup> Ne convenez-vous pas, mon cher philosophe, que c'est dans une pareille circonstance qu'il est infiniment doux de n'avoir rendu son ami infidèle que le témoin d'actions justes et de discours honnêtes? Les méchants se réjouissent de la mort de leurs amis, ce sont des complices qui pourraient être indiscrets, et dont ils sont débarrassés. Les honnêtes gens s'affligent de la mort des leurs, ce sont des panégyristes qui leur échappent.

Vivez longtemps pour nous; nous tâcherons de vous conserver le plus longtemps que nous pourrons, nous dont vous savez bien que l'éloge ne vous manquera pas. Je vous salue et vous embrasse de tout mon cœur. Servez M. et Mad<sup>e</sup> de Neufville, je vous en conjure; et me croyez entièrement votre très obéissant serviteur.

## 3

Monsieur et cher Philosophe,—On n'a rien pour rien dans ce monde; il faut payer ses vices—il faut payer ses vertus; et n'allez pas vous imaginer que vous jouirez gratuitement de la plus grande considération. On voudra vous voir—on voudra se vanter de vous avoir vu. Ayez donc la bonté d'ouvrir votre porte, et d'offrir votre face ronde et riante de Bernardin à un jeune Pensylvain qui a juré de ne pas repasser les mers sans vous avoir rendu son

<sup>28</sup> Sir Samuel Romilly was also told by Diderot how much he dreaded the publication of Rousseau's *Confessions*; see above p. 114. But here, as in his *Essay on Claudius and Nero*, Diderot shows that he had no great reasons to fear for himself personally.

hommage. Ne trouverez-vous pas fort étrange que ce soit un Français qui vous adresse un de vos compatriotes? C'est que tout est sans dessus dessous dans ce moment-ci. Le Roi de France se jette sur les possessions du pape; le Turc veut mettre la paix entre ces chiens de Chrétiens qui se déchirent.<sup>11</sup> Nous écrivons contre le despotisme; et il nous vient des pamphlets de Londres en faveur de la tyrannie. Ah, mon cher philosophe! pleurons et gémissons sur le sort de la philosophie. Nous prêchons la sagesse à des sourds, et nous sommes encore bien loin du siècle de la raison. Nous sommes même infectés ici d'une secte de Machiavélistes qui prétendent que ce siècle ne viendra jamais. Cela serait bien capable de résoudre à prendre son bonnet de nuit, à poser mollement sa tête sur un oreiller, et à laisser aller le monde à sa fantaisie. Qu'en dites-vous? Quoi qu'il en soit, recevez gracieusement mon jeune Pensylvain. Donnez-lui de bons conseils. Surtout persuadez-lui de mitiger son bel enthousiasme pour les progrès de la médecine. S'il vous présente sa dissertation inaugurale, vous y lirez que ce jeune homme a fait des expériences dangereuses sur lui-même.<sup>12</sup> Il ne faut pas se tuer pour apprendre à guérir les autres; d'autant plus que le bien qu'on se promet de leur faire est très incertain, et que le mal qu'on se fait à soi-même est très sûr. N'allez pas étayer votre

<sup>11</sup> The Turks declared war on Russia in 1768, when the first partition of Poland was considered.

<sup>12</sup> We have not been able to find more particulars concerning this young doctor from Pennsylvania.

paresse de cette maxime: nous n'aurions plus rien de vous, et ce serait grand dommage. Les bonnes têtes sont si rares, qu'il n'est pas permis à celles qui sont bonnes d'être oisives. Je vous salue,—je vous aime,—je vous révère—et suis avec ces sentiments pour toute ma vie, monsieur et cher philosophe, votre très humble et très obéissant serviteur.

A Paris, ce 17 mars 1769.

C. AN UNPUBLISHED LETTER FROM DIDEROT TO  
BRET

(The following letter, to which we alluded above, p. 293, was copied by us from the original in the British Museum, Egerton MSS. 19. The spelling is modernized.)

A MONSIEUR BRET<sup>14</sup>

Monsieur,

Le plan de ma pièce est resté tel que vous savez. La première m'avait donné tant de tracasseries que j'ai été vingt fois sur le point d'abandonner la seconde et de jeter au feu ce que j'en avais fait. Mes amis m'en ont empêché. Je l'ai reprise. J'y ai un peu travaillé, mais si peu que ce n'est pas la peine de dire. Je ne prévois pas qu'on puisse l'imprimer de

<sup>14</sup> Antoine Bret (1717-1792). The two plays discussed in this letter seem to be Bret's *Le Jaloux*, which was never performed, and Diderot's *Fils Naturel*, which have one "incident de rien" in common: a man suspects his friend of having paid addresses to a lady whom he himself loves.

deux mois; l'impression en prendra bien un encore. D'ici à trois mois, je crois que vous aurez été représenté, applaudi, et lu. Je n'en prends nulle inquiétude. Vous réussirez sûrement, et ce ne seront pas des petites nuances de rien qui empêcheront que je n'aie aussi du succès, nos genres étant si différents. J'y ai pensé, et j'y ai bien pensé. Ce que nous avons de conforme est un petit incident de rien. Aussi, Monsieur, allez votre chemin. Je sens toute la politesse de ce que vous m'écrivez, et je n'en accepte à la lettre que ce que vous me dites des qualités de mon âme. Quelque opinion que vous en ayez, j'espère que vous ne la verrez jamais au-dessous de ce que [vous] en aurez pensé. Je vous salue, vous embrasse de tout mon coeur, et vous prie de me compter parmi vos amis: c'est vous en dire assez.

Si je parais le dernier, et qu'à la lecture de votre ouvrage je trouve que nous nous sommes rencontrés plus que je ne crois, je vous rendrai justice, et je me la rendrai à moi-même. Si je vous précède, vous en ferez de même, et je serai content. Ah, mon ami, soyez sûr qu'il est impossible à d'honnêtes gens de se donner en pareil cas le moindre petit chagrin; et nous sommes, je crois, d'honnêtes gens. Au reste, mon cher, ce que vous dites de la facilité que je pourrais avoir de retourner mon plan, n'est pas tout à fait comme vous l'imaginez. Ce plan est cousu de manière, cette charpente assemblée de façon que je n'en peux pas arracher un point, déplacer une cheville que tout ne se renverse. Je vous salue et vous

embrasse derechef, et je suis pour vous avec tous les  
sentiments que vous avez pour moi,

Monsieur,

Votre très humble

et très obligé serviteur,

DIDEROT.

ce 29 9bre 1753.

Je vous confie où j'en suis de mon ouvrage et le temps où je crois qu'il pourra paraître; c'est à vous seul que je fais cette confidence; et j'exige de vous [de] n'en dire rien à personne; ce sont deux circonstances qui, je crois, ne vous importent en rien.

Mais pourquoi m'écrire? Vous avez du plaisir à me voir; j'en ai de mon côté; pourquoi diable ne pas venir?—

#### D. LETTERS FROM DIDEROT TO JOHN WILKES

M. M. Tourneux has published two letters from Diderot to Wilkes: one in the *Œuvres Complètes*, XIX, 498, from the English translation given by John Almon in *The Correspondence of the late John Wilkes with his friends, printed from the original MSS.* . . . , London, 1805, vol. V, p. 243;—the other in his *Diderot et Catherine II*, Paris, 1899, pp. 389–390.

We reprint here, with two slight corrections, the second of these letters as our No. 1; Nos. 2, 3 and 4 have not hitherto been published. We copied these four letters from Addit. MSS. 30.877, ff. 81, 83, 85, 87, in the British Museum. The spelling is modernized.)

## 1

A WILKES

Monsieur et très honoré Gracchus, avez-vous vu mon ami Grimm ? Avez-vous bu la santé de vos amis de Paris ? Je crois que non. Attaché à un prince, il lui aura été difficile d'approcher sa lèvre de la coupe séditeuse d'un tribun du peuple. Que faites-vous à Londres à présent ? Vous qui savez si bien réveiller dans les âmes le démon patriotique, que n'êtes-vous ici ? L'homme qui sait susciter de grands mouvements aime à être le spectateur de grandes révolutions. Il n'y a que deux instants intéressants dans la durée des empires, celui de leur grandeur et celui de leur décadence, surtout lorsque cette décadence naît de petites causes imprévues et s'accélère avec une grande rapidité. Imaginez un palais immense dont l'aspect majestueux et solide vous en imposait, promettait à votre imagination une durée éternelle ; imaginez ensuite que ses fondements s'ébranlent et que vous voyiez tout à coup ses murs énormes se séparer et se disjoindre. Voilà précisément le spectacle que nous offririons à votre spéculation. Alors les beaux-arts se sauvent de chez un peuple, comme on voit par un instinct divin les rats sortir d'une maison qui menace ruine. Le philosophe, moins sage que l'habitant à museau pointu et à longue queue, reste jusqu'à ce qu'un moellon de l'édifice lui casse la tête. M<sup>lle</sup> Biheron<sup>15</sup> qui vous remettra

<sup>15</sup> See the notice on this lady in M. Tourneux, *Diderot et Catherine II*, pp. 390-391.



ce billet extravagant est une souris effarouchée qui sort de son trou et qui va chercher chez vous de la sécurité. Cette souris est une souris distinguée dans son espèce. Elle justifiera la considération dont elle jouit ici, par une quantité de très beaux ouvrages. Ce sont des précis anatomiques d'une vérité et d'une exactitude<sup>m</sup> merveilleuses. Je vous prie de l'accueillir et de lui rendre tous les bons offices qui dépendront de vous. Ma fille a fait avec facilité et sans dégoût un cours d'anatomie chez elle. Si vous m'en croyez, vous engagerez Mademoiselle Wilkes à prendre quelques-unes de ses leçons. Quoique ce ne soit point l'objet du voyage de Mademoiselle Biheron, comme elle joint à ses connaissances un grand caractère de bienfaisance, je ne doute point qu'elle ne se fit un plaisir de vous obliger dans votre enfant. Je présente mon respect à Mademoiselle Wilkes. Je vous embrasse, vous, de tout mon cœur, quoique vous soyez un grand vaurien; mais je ne sais comment cela s'est fait: toute ma vie j'ai eu et j'aurai un faible pour les vauriens, tels que vous s'entend.

Votre très humble, très obéissant serviteur et un peu vaurien aussi.

DIDEROT.

Ce 19 octobre 1771.

2

Monsieur et très honoré Alderman, Je vous ai adressé Mademoiselle Biheron, femme distinguée par : " "Exactitude," instead of "étude" (as printed by M. Tourneux); and above, "disjoindre" instead of "dissoudre."

son mérite anatomique; je vous adresse aujourd'hui Monsieur Pasquier,<sup>17</sup> peintre en portrait de notre Académie. C'est un habile homme, qui mérite par la douceur de son caractère et par son talent que vous le favorisiez. Favorisez-le donc. Ah, mon cher politique, les sciences et les arts nous quittent. Si leur naissance montre un peuple qui sort de la barbarie; leur progrès, un peuple qui s'achemine à la grandeur; leur splendeur, un peuple éclairé, puissant et florissant; leur mépris, leur indigence et leur dégradation doivent marquer un peuple qui descend et qui s'en retourne à la stupidité et à la misère. On me demandait un jour comment on rendait la vigueur à une nation qui l'avait perdue; je répondis, comme Médée rendit la jeunesse à son père; en le dépeçant et en le faisant bouillir. Je vous salue et vous embrasse de tout mon cœur. Favorisez Monsieur Pasquier, et comptez-moi au nombre de vos amis.

DIDEROT.

Mon très humble respect à Mad<sup>lle</sup> Wilkes.

Ce 14 9bre 1771.

3

Ami Wilkes, vous vous êtes bien trouvé jusqu'à présent de tous ceux que je vous ai adressés. Ils étaient tous dignes de vous connaître et d'être connus de vous. Monsieur le Baron de Clingstad ne fera pas exception. C'est un homme également recom-

<sup>17</sup> Pierre Pasquier (1731-1806), had exhibited a portrait of Diderot in enamel, at the Salon of 1769, and other portraits in the Salon of 1771. See XI, 449, 507; XII, 46.

mandable par la bonté, la franchise et la douceur de son caractère, et par son esprit et ses lumières. Accueillez-le donc comme j'accueillerais celui qui vous honorerait de son amitié. Monsieur le Baron de Klingstad m'honore de la sienne. Il est attaché à une souveraine, ma bienfaitrice, et nous aurions une haute opinion de la cour de Pétersbourg, si l'impératrice était entourée d'un grand nombre de pareils serviteurs. Bonjour, mon digne et très aimé Wilkes. Mad<sup>lle</sup> Biheron se loue infiniment de vous. Je vous salue et vous embrasse de tout mon cœur.

DIDEROT.

A Paris, ce 10 juil. 1772.

4

Ami Wilkes, que faites-vous? Si vous vous reposez, vous êtes bien à plaindre. J'ai lu avec une grande satisfaction les différents discours que vous avez prononcés, sur l'affaire des provinciaux.<sup>19</sup> Je les ai trouvés pleins d'éloquence, de dignité et de force. J'en ai aussi fait un, et le voici: "Messieurs, je ne vous parlerai point de la justice ou de l'injustice de votre conduite. Je sais bien que ce mot n'est que du bruit, quand il s'agit de l'intérêt général. Je pourrais vous parler de vos moyens de réussir, et vous demander si vous êtes assez forts pour jouer le rôle d'opresseurs; cela toucherait un peu de plus près à la question. Cependant je n'en ferai rien. Mais je m'en tiendrai à vous supplier de jeter les yeux sur les nations qui vous haïssent; interrogez-

<sup>19</sup> The American provincials.

les; voyez ce qu'elles pensent de vous, et dites-moi jusques à quand vous avez résolu de faire rire vos ennemis."

Il paraît ici un papier qu'on dit être d'un homme important de votre nation; il paraît par ce papier que le projet secret de la mère-patrie est de faire égorger la moitié des colons, et de réduire le reste à la condition des nègres.

En effet, cela lèverait toute difficulté pour le présent et pour l'avenir.

Au milieu du tumulte public, portez-vous bien; soyez gai; buvez de bons vins; et lorsqu'il vous prendra fantaisie d'être tendre, adressez-vous à des femmes qui ne fassent pas soupirer longtemps. Elles amusent autant que les autres; elles occupent moins; on les possède sans inquiétude, et on les quitte sans regret.

C'est un jeune homme très sage qui vous remettra ces sottises. S'il n'était que cela, je ne vous l'adresserais pas; mais il est très aimable, et très instruit. C'est un ami de Monsieur Suard, et c'est un des miens.

Je présente mon respect à Mademoiselle Wilkes, et je vous prie de me croire toujours avec les mêmes sentiments

Votre très humble et très obéissant  
serviteur et ami

DIDEROT.

(Received at London June 25, 1776).

## APPENDIX II

### A CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF DIDEROT'S MAIN WORKS

Most of Diderot's works having been printed posthumously, it has been thought advisable to give here the dates of publication of his most important writings, together with the probable dates of composition. A similar table will be found in the excellent *Extraits de Diderot* by the late Joseph Texte (Paris, 4th edition, 1909), and a complete chronology in M. G. Lanson's *Manuel bibliographique de la littérature française moderne, 1500-1900* (Part III, Chap. XI), For full discussions of the dates of composition, we refer to the *Notices préliminaires* prefixed to each work in the Assézat-Tourneux edition of Diderot.

Posthumous works are in italics.

| Composition.  | Publication. |
|---|--------------|
| 1745 Principes de philosophie morale ou<br>Essai sur le mérite et la vertu, par<br>Mylord S * * *, traduit de l'anglais.. | 1745         |
| 1746 Pensées philosophiques .....   | 1746         |
| 1747 <i>La Promenade du sceptique, ou Les<br/>Allées</i> .....  | 1830         |
| 1747 De la Suffisance de la religion naturelle.   | 1770         |
| 1748 Les Bijoux indiscrets .....  | 1748         |
| 1749 Lettre sur les aveugles à l'usage de ceux<br>qui voient .....  | 1749         |
| 1750 Prospectus de l'Encyclopédie .....   | 1750         |
| 1746-1751 Encyclopédie, tome I .....  | 1751         |
| Encyclopédie, tome II .....   | 1752         |

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| 1752-1757 | Encyclopédie, tomes III-VII. 1753-1757  |      |
| 1759-1765 | Encyclopédie, tomes VIII-XVII... 1765   |      |
|           | Encyclopédie, Planches, tomes I-V. 1765   |      |
|           | Encyclopédie, Planches, tomes VI-   |      |
|           | XI .....  | 1772 |
| 1765-1777 | Encyclopédie, Suppléments, tomes  |      |
|           | I-V .....   | 1777 |
| 1751      | Recherches philosophiques sur l'origine et<br>la nature du beau (article "Beau").                                     | 1751 |
| 1751      | Lettre sur les sourds et muets à l'usage<br>de ceux qui entendent et qui parlent ..                                   | 1751 |
| 1752      | Suite de l'Apologie de M. l'abbé de Prades<br>en réponse à l'instruction pastorale de<br>Mgr l'évêque d'Auxerre. .... | 1752 |
| 1754      | Pensées sur l'interprétation de la nature.  | 1754 |
| 1753(?)   | Le Fils Naturel ou Les épreuves<br>de la vertu .....  | 1757 |
| 1758      | Le Père de famille .....  | 1758 |
| 1759      | <i>Salon de 1759</i> .....  | 1813 |
| 1761      | <i>Salon de 1761</i> .....  | 1819 |
| 1763      | <i>Salon de 1763</i> .....  | 1857 |
| 1765      | <i>Salon de 1765;—Essai sur la peinture.</i>  | 1795 |
| 1767      | <i>Salon de 1767</i> .....  | 1798 |
| 1769      | <i>Salon de 1769</i> .....  | 1819 |
| 1771      | <i>Salon de 1771</i> .....  | 1857 |
| 1775      | <i>Salon de 1775</i> .....  | 1857 |
| 1781      | <i>Salon de 1781</i> .....  | 1857 |
| 1759-1774 | <i>Lettres à Mlle Volland.</i> .....  | 1830 |
| 1760      | <i>Le Joueur, drame imité de l'anglais</i> ....   | 1819 |
| 1760      | <i>La Religieuse</i> .....  | 1796 |

|           |   |      |
|-----------|---|------|
| 1760(?)   | <i>Jacques le Fataliste et son maître</i> .....   | 1796 |
| 1761      | Eloge de Richardson .....   | 1762 |
| 1762      | Réflexions sur Térence .....  | 1762 |
| 1762-1773 | <i>Le Neveu de Rameau, satire.</i> German translation by Goethe, 1805; —translated from the German, by De Saur, 1821;—publ. from a copy, 1821;—from another copy, 1875;—from the MS, by M. Monval ..... | 1891 |
| 1765-1769 | <i>Lettres à Mlle Jodin</i> .....   | 1821 |
| 1766-1773 | <i>Lettres à Falconet</i> .... (Thirteen letters in)  | 1831 |
| 1767      | <i>Lettre historique et politique sur le commerce de la librairie</i> .....   | 1861 |
| 1769      | <i>Entretien entre D'Alembert et Diderot. Le Rêve de D'Alembert. Suite de l'entretien</i> .....   | 1830 |
| 1770      | Les deux amis de Bourbonne .....  | 1773 |
| 1772      | Regrets sur ma vieille robe de chambre.   | 1772 |
| 1772      | <i>Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville ou Dialogue entre A. et B. sur l'inconvénient d'attacher des idées morales à certaines actions physiques qui n'en comportent pas</i> .....                      | 1796 |
| 1773-1778 | <i>Paradoxe sur le comédien</i> .....   | 1830 |
| 1773      | Entretien d'un père avec ses enfants, ou Du danger de se mettre au-dessus des lois .....  | 1773 |

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|-----------|--|-----------|
| 1773-1774 | <i>Réfutation suivie de l'ouvrage<br/>d'Helvétius intitulé L'Homme ..</i>                                      | 1875      |
| 1775-1776 | <i>Plan d'une Université pour le gou-<br/>vernement de Russie .....</i>  | 1813-1814 |
|           | (complete)   | 1875      |
| 1776      | Entretien d'un philosophe avec la Maré-<br>chale de * * *  | 1776      |
| 1778      | Essai sur la vie de Sénèque le philosophe,<br>sur ses écrits, et sur les règnes de<br>Claude et de Néron ..... | 1778      |
|           | (Second edition, much enlarged)  | 1782      |
| 1781      | <i>Est-il bon? est-il méchant? .....</i>   | 1834      |



## APPENDIX III

### BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

This is not a complete bibliography of Diderot, but only a list of the principal works that have been used in the preparation of the foregoing study of Diderot's relationship to English thought.

For full bibliographical information concerning Diderot, we again refer to M. G. Lanson's *Manuel bibliographique de la littérature française moderne, 1500-1900*, Part III (*Dix-huitième siècle*), Chap. XI.

—See also in vol. XX of Diderot's *Œuvres Complètes*, pp. 141-147, a list of the main writings concerning the person and the works of Diderot up to 1877, by M. Maurice Tourneux; and J. J. C. L(eyds), *Principaux écrits relatifs à la personne et aux œuvres, au temps et à l'influence de Diderot*, Paris and Amsterdam, 1887.

For the biographical and critical works concerning the English writers who are mentioned below, we refer to the Index.

#### I. DIDEROT

##### (a) Works

*Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, edited by J. Assézat (as far as vol. XVII) and M. Tourneux, Paris, 1875-1877, 20 vols, 8vo.

*Correspondance littéraire* (1753-1790) de Grimm (also partly by Diderot, Madame d'Épinay and Meister), edited by M. Tourneux, Paris, 1877-1882, 16 vols 8vo.

- M. Tourneux.** *Diderot et Catherine II* (containing unpublished fragments), Paris, 1899, 8vo.

(b) *Biography*

- Madame de Vandeuil** (Diderot's daughter). *Mémoires sur Diderot* (1787), reprinted in vol. I of the Assézat-Tourneux edition.
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(c) *Biographical Criticism*

- K. Rosenkranz.** *Diderot's Leben und Werke*, Leipzig, 1866, 2 vols 8vo.
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- L. Ducros.** *Diderot, l'homme et l'écrivain*, Paris, 1894, in-12.
- J. Reinach.** *Diderot*, Paris, 1894, in-16.
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(c) *Criticism*

- Sainte-Beuve.** *Portraits littéraires*, Paris, 1862-1864, 3 vols 8vo; vol. I (article written in 1831).

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- E. Bersot.** *Etudes sur le XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, 1855, 2 vols 8vo; vol. I.
- H. Hettner.** *Literaturgeschichte des XVIII<sup>en</sup> Jahrhunderts*, 1856,—the 5th edition Braunschweig, 1894, 2 vols 8vo; vol. II.
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- F. Brunetière.** *Etudes critiques sur l'histoire de la littérature française*, Paris, 1880-1907, 8vo., vol. II.
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## II. ENGLISH WRITERS

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- The Works of Francis Bacon . . .*, collected and edited by James Spedding, R. L. Ellis, D. D.

- Heath, Boston, 1860-1864 (American edition), 15 vols in-12. *Philosophical Works*, I-VII.
- Shaftesbury.** *Characteristics*, London, 1737 (5th edition), 3 vols (for *A Notion of the Historical Draught or Tablature of the Judgment of Hercules, according to Prodicus*, and *A Letter concerning the Art or Science of Design*, not included in the following).
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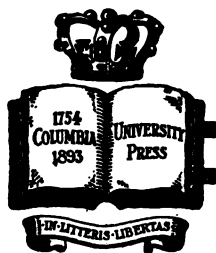
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